



Curt N. Fernau
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London postmarks used
on printed matter and
parcels from 1860



A guide for collectors



Translated from German
by P.E. Robinson, FRPSL



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Philatelic Society (Switzerland)
1998



In the 20th year of the Society's existence



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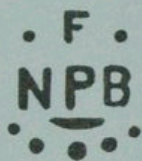


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Foreword

In 1978 a group of philatelists founded, in Geneva, the Great Britain & Commonwealth Philatelic Society (Switzerland), after they had, during the previous year, assessed the possibility of a second international philatelic society existing in this international city.

They drew up a constitution and elected a committee, with Curt Fernau being Chairman for the first 4 1/2 years. Eight years on, he left Geneva and his occupation in the International Labour Office and retired to Germany. However, he remained true to the Society, and in connection with the 20th anniversary of the GB/CWPS he compiled this guide for interested members and other collectors.

Apart from the fact that this guide was first published in German, in philatelic terms it enters virgin territory. As far as we know, such a detailed and thorough description of the London postmarks used on printed matter has never appeared. This would not have been possible without the energetic assistance given to the author by the Society, in particular our members Frank D. Balkowski, Hans Bürki, Werner Graf, Dr Karl Knopke, Dr H.D. Sauter, Helmut Kleinke, Peter Seidl, Erwin Seyfried and others. It is only with this sort of cooperation that such a useful reference work for building a collection can be produced, which will, we hope, prove to be useful outside the limits of our Society.

This publication demonstrates that, after 20 years, our society is alive and well. My thanks go to all those who worked together in its compilation.

Steinhausen (Switzerland)
1998

Hendrikus L. van den Heuvel
1st Chairman

Contents

	Page	
Introduction	3	
Early history - Newspaper and Calendar taxes	5	
Postmarks of the Newspaper Branch	8	
Unusual types	13	
Foreign Branch, Foreign and Inland Sections	14	
The London E.C. printed paper marks	17	
Private marks for pre-cancelling mail	19	
"Dumb" postmarks, and the postmark with the longest period of use	20	
London triangular marks	21	
Handstamps used at district, branch and suburban offices	23	
Parcel postmarks	24	
Various oddities	27	
Author's note	27	

EARLY HISTORY

Newspaper and Calendar taxes

Newspapers and calendars were the first widely used items of printed matter. They brought news and information to readers all over the country, though at first they were not disseminated so widely due to the lack of suitable transportation.

As printed matter was a form of merchandise, taxes were levied by the state. This was done through post offices, or via the printers or publishers. This meant that newspapers had to be registered at the main post office in London. They were delivered free of charge within a three-mile radius: outside this area newspapers had to be printed on paper which had previously received a red Treasury tax mark.

A complicated system was employed to do this: 25 sheets of paper were positioned so that only one corner of each was protruding, and then each sheet corner was printed using a copper plate. The dies and the series of dies were numbered, and from 1840, the name of the newspaper or magazine was also included in the design of the mark (Fig. 1).

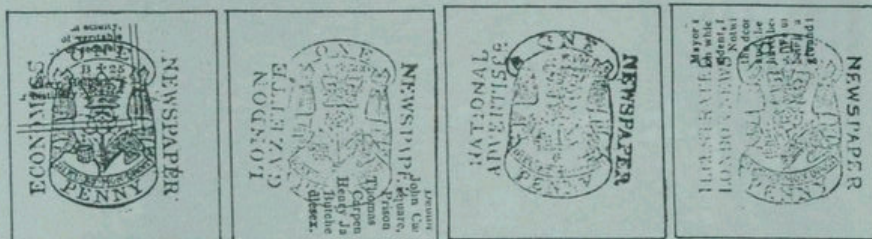


Fig. 1

From 1711 a series of tax laws governed this procedure. As was later done with books, so that taxes gave way to transmission costs (this eventually being half the normal letter rate according to weight) this also occurred with the newspaper tax. However, by 1855 it was already permitted to prepay postage on newspapers by means of stamps, especially for overseas dispatch, though some red London newspaper marks can be found on newspapers up to 1870. In the case of newspapers prepaid by stamps, handled by the London Chief Office, by 1859 the Foreign Branch had its own postmarks for printed matter (Fig. 2)



Fig. 2

Fig. 3

Fig. 4

Fig. 5

Fig. 6

Between 1855 and 1870, special newspaper sections were established in the main post offices throughout the country, in particular in the publishing centres of Cork, Edinburgh, Glasgow

and London, and these offices had their own special postmarks for cancelling stamps used on printed matter (Figs. 3 to 6). All the postmarks except the one shown in Fig. 2 had the initials N.P.B. for "Newspaper Branch", or the word "Newspaper". Only in London was there a distinction between inland and overseas dispatch, there being the Foreign Branch, later the Foreign Section.

In the period between 1855 and 1862, the number of printed items dispatched doubled every three years, and reached 14 million per year. By 1871 the figure had reached 99 million. There must have been a hive of activity in the London Chief Office, as a contemporary engraving shows (Fig. 7, the arrival of mail collected from mail boxes).



Fig. 7

The transition from a delivery tax to the collection of postage, with all its difficulties, is best documented by the postmarks used on printed matter and newspapers. Private interests were involved here, as local tax collectors had benefited from each sheet of paper sold to publishers. However, the strengthening of the postal monopoly due to the introduction of postage rates for printed matter could no longer be halted.

The first postmarks for cancelling stamps used on printed matter were cut from felt, and the handstamps contained an ink reservoir so as to avoid constant re-inking from the pad. It follows that many early postmarks are often indistinct. They are often badly struck, so that the design can only be clearly identified after careful examination. In his book "The History of the Postmarks of the British Isles", published in 1909, John G. Hendy tried hard to illustrate postmarks, and later authors often abandoned the task of classifying and showing the various types. Fortunately, the later postmarks of these types were made of metal, and so details of the design can be more clearly discerned. All the same, Alcock and Holland in their book "The Postmarks of Great Britain and Ireland", published in 1940, struggled with the same problem, and to a large extent relied on Hendy. However, G. Brumell in his book "British Post Office

Numbers 1844-1906" wrote "I do not propose to describe the various obliterations of rough design used in the Newspaper Branch". One of his successors, Dr Whitney in his book "Collect British Postmarks", simplified things by illustrating a single example, and stating that there were many similar types.

This guide can perhaps help to remedy this deficiency.

In this world of cyberspace we should not forget that it was originally the printed word that enabled us to widen our knowledge of the world. Also, it was the delivery of newspapers, magazines, printed matter and books, with all the inherent technical difficulties, that laid the foundations for technical development. To the philatelist, the postmarks and their study form a part of this story, a part which should not be laid aside in the heat of the moment, just because the postmarks are often indistinct.

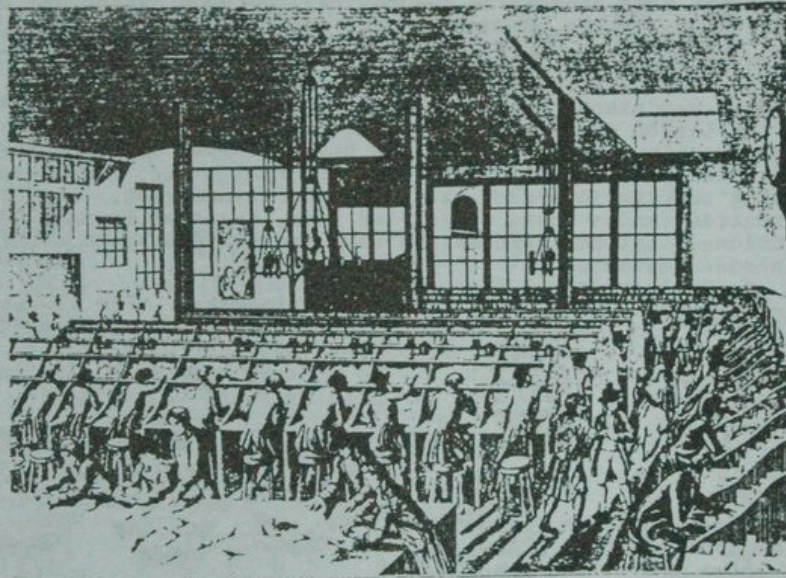


Fig. 8 - Sorting department of the London Chief Office in 1850

The Postmarks of the Newspaper Branch

In large cities and publishing centres, each main post office established its own Newspaper Branch. This was done in Cork, Dublin, Edinburgh, Glasgow and - in particular - London. For cancelling bulk postings, in most places ordinary types of postmarks were used. These were inscribed with the letters NPB for Newspaper Branch in addition to having the date and time of posting, as well as a code.

However, this did not apply in London. Here, the date and time of posting, as well as the name of the city - London - were usually dispensed with. The makeup of the postmark comprised only the initials NPB, together with a code number or letter to identify the handstamp. Some long series of handstamps were in use at the same time, with up to 100 different codes. If there were not enough letters in the alphabet, the design of postmarks was reversed, horizontally or vertically, so as to allow another series. This resulted in postmark types occurring in pairs, which are thus shown here. Sometimes the same design can be found with letters or numbers used for the codes.

The production of handstamps was overseen by the London Chief Office, from where other post offices were supplied with postmarks. Handstamps that were no longer needed were also returned to the London Chief Office so that they could be issued to other offices. It therefore sometimes happened that the same postmark was used by different offices at different times, for example during busy periods such as the pre-Christmas rush. Little information can be found in printed form, and even Brumell often mentioned that his information came from covers shown to him by other collectors.

Early marks



Fig. 9



Fig. 10

Postmarks found on the earliest stamps do not have codes. Fig. 10 shows a type that was in use at many offices. The numbers recorded are 1 - 15 (except 9) and 52 - 74 (except 66). The Newspaper Branch used Nos. 52 to 74 except 66; the others were used elsewhere.

Other postmarks whose design includes a diamond, while not indicating the place or date of posting, in other respects resemble the duplex cancellations which were then in general use. Figs. 11 to 13 show three of these marks, which were crude-

ly manufactured. The highest number seen by Brumell is 51. These were not used only on printed matter; they were also occasionally found on postcards.



Fig. 11



Fig. 12



Fig. 13

Other early postmarks closely resemble each other, and often differ only in detail. Figs. 14 and 15 show two very similar types, of which Fig. 15 is evidently the earlier. In this case, the code letter "J" is also known.

Here, and in the following sections we are concerned with regular series of postmarks. At the time of going to press, the

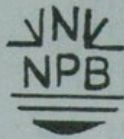


Fig. 14



Fig. 15

letters D, U and Z have been recorded for the type shown in Fig. 16, and the letters D, K, L and Z for Fig. 17.

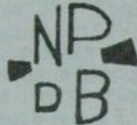


Fig. 16



Fig. 17

Fig. 18 shows the only postmark of the type that has been seen, while the letter "J" has also been recorded for Fig. 19.



Fig. 18



Fig. 19

The two following types resemble the Maltese Cross. Some London crosses had a number in the centre, and so identifying postmarks by means of codes was not new.



Fig. 20



Fig. 21

The two following postmarks differ greatly from each other in appearance, and also in their period of use. Fig. 22 was only in use for a short time, while Fig. 23 can also be found on 20th century stamps.

Two postmarks that may easily be confused have a code letter either above or below the P in



Fig. 22

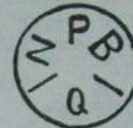


Fig. 23

NPB. The highest number seen is 40, and here the letters recorded are A, B, C, E, H, J, K and S, indicating a fairly long series.



Fig. 24



Fig. 25

One of the more imaginatively designed marks can be seen in Fig. 26. The horizontal "B" at the base is the final letter of NPB, and the small B is a serial letter, of which the following have been recorded: A, B, D, I, O, V and Y. Fig. 27 shows a postmark that has the code letter in the centre: the letters A, D, E, L, O, R, T, W and Y have been seen, suggesting that a complete alphabet might have existed.

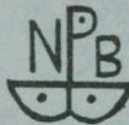


Fig. 26



Fig. 27

In 1870 the first small-size 1/2d stamp was issued. So as to maintain the same sheet size, the stamp was half the size of a 1d. stamp, so that 480 stamps made up the sheet. For these small stamps a pair of postmarks was used in which a number appears above or below the P in NPB. The following numbers have been recorded above the letter P: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9 and 12. Below the P Nos. 9 and 11 have been seen. The reason for the

issue of a 1/2d stamp (SG 48/9) was the establishment of a 1/2d printed paper rate. Note the small 20mm diameter of the postmarks.

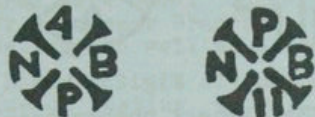


Fig. 28 Fig. 29

A related pair of NPB marks have code letters at the bottom. Fig. 30 has been seen with the letters A, E, M, O and W, and Fig. 31 with E, F, L and T.



Fig. 30 Fig. 31

A pair of postmarks which are a mirror image of each other, that is, which have the code letter at the top or the bottom, were widely used. Almost half the alphabet has been seen for each type, and so it may be assumed that the two types accounted for the whole alphabet.

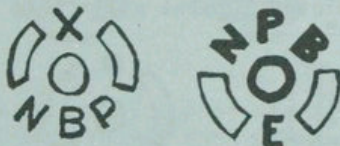


Fig. 32 Fig. 33

These, and the postmarks which follow, were used in the 1880s and are particularly common on the 1/2d stamps, SG 164/5, 187 and 197/8.

A pair of postmarks without a code, but with differing numbers of bars should also be mentioned here, as well two marks that differ in diameter (Fig. 34-37).

Another mirror-image pair of marks, which has a code letter



Fig. 34



Fig. 35



Fig. 36



Fig. 37

at the top or bottom, with a short bar in the opposite position, was very widely used. The code letters E, F, S, W, X, Y, and Z have been recorded above the P, and J, L, P, Q and Y below the P.



Fig. 38



Fig. 39

Fig. 40 shows a similar mark, which has been seen with code letters K, S, W and X. The postmark shown in Fig. 41 is the only one that has been seen in this design, though the figure over the P suggests that it is one of a series.



Fig. 40



Fig. 41

Relevant philatelic literature shows the following pair of postmarks. The complete alphabet is accounted for by the serial letters on postmarks of the Fig. 42 type, and only a few letters are missing in the case of Type 43. The fact that these postmarks have been widely recorded is explained by the ease

with which they can be identified on printed matter.

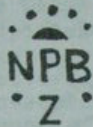


Fig. 42

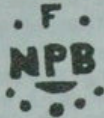


Fig. 43

Much more difficult to identify are the following two marks, which differ only in the lower portion, and in the code letter in the centre, which is inclined at 90 degrees to the left. The codes shown are O and I.



Fig. 44



Fig. 45

These postmarks are often misrepresented as single-ring marks. An outer ring often shows on impressions of the postmarks that are found, but it was not part of the design of the marks. It sometimes appears as a result of the fact that many items of printed matter that were posted were soft and "yielding" to the impression of the die, therefore the outer rim of the handstamp itself appears as a ring. For the same reason, details are often unclear - see above. The following two marks with the code letter W, and also the L, have been seen in this form.



Fig. 46



Fig. 47

The next two postmarks are among the "classics" of this type of mark. More than half of the alphabet has been seen in the code

letters of each type, and so it seems that there were complete series of each type.



Fig. 48



Fig. 49

The same may apply to the following two marks, although only a few examples have been seen, with F, M, N and O at the bottom, and B, G, T, W and X at the top.



Fig. 50



Fig. 51

Two more easily confused marks are shown in Figs. 52 and 53. The former has been seen with the letters A, L, O, R, W, X, Y and Z, and the latter with A, C, D and O.



Fig. 52

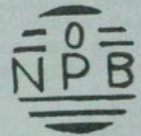


Fig. 53

The following two marks also have horizontal bars, though one of these goes through the centre; the letters D, E, K, L and O have been recorded at bottom, with D, M and O at the top.



Fig. 54



Fig. 55

The type shown in Fig. 56 also has a bar through the centre, and can be found with 18 dif-

ferent code letters. Fig.57 shows a type which has been seen with the letters B, C, E, F, N, U and V.

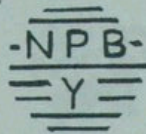


Fig.56



Fig.57

The two types which certainly have a "true" outer rim, are found as NPB and other marks. The known letters are B, D and O at the bottom, and K and W at the top.



Fig.58



Fig.59

A few individual types that may turn up are shown in the following pages.

From about 1870 the double-ring shown in Fig.60 can be found, especially on Penny Reds (SG 43/4). The code letters O, P and X have been found in the centre. The mark shown in Fig. 61 was evidently also used on packets, although only in this version.



Fig.60



Fig.61

The type shown in Fig.62 also turns up used at the E.C.office. The code letters C, L and V have been seen here (compare with Fig. 124).

A fairly large (28mm diameter) mark is shown in Fig.63. Similar marks were used for precanceling in the E.C. area.

For the sake of completion, two further types should be shown

here. Fig.64 has only been seen in this form, and Fig.65 exists only as an illustration in a catalogue. In the latter case it is questionable whether the mark actually had an out ring, or if this is from the outer rim of the handstamp.



Fig.62

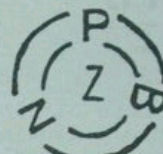


Fig.63



Fig.64



Fig.65

In January 1889 two new postmarks were issued (Fig.66). One has a letter A over NPB and an M below; the other a letter B above and an E below. Other combinations found are C over M and E, D over M and E, G over M and E. Brumell contends that "M" stands for morning and "E" for evening collection times. I can add E over E, that I have seen.



Fig.66

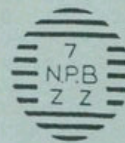


Fig.67

For Fig.67, the same source quotes the following combinations: at first A, B and C over NPB, followed by D, E, F and G, and finally numbers from 1 to 7, in each case with ZZ below.

The meaning of the double ZZ in the early handstamps has never been clearly established, but some sources estimate that the two letters stood for "too late for posting the same day".

Fig.68 seems to be another type in this series. Almost contemporary with the previous two types, it appeared at first with the letters A to G over NPB (and MD below, which Brumell suggests may stand for "mid-day") and then the numbers 1 to 7 instead of letters. The fact that more of these marks were issued on the same day as the previous two series must have had some meaning, but records have unfortunately been lost.



Fig.68

Dated NPB marks

In contrast to the normal postmarks used by the Newspaper Branch, the dated ones have a simple appearance. Three examples from around the turn of the century demonstrate this; only Fig.71 has a code (5).

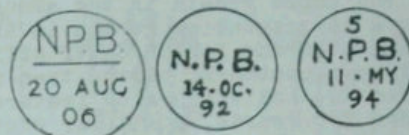


Fig.69 Fig.70 Fig.71

The corresponding boxed marks have code letters as well as numbers.

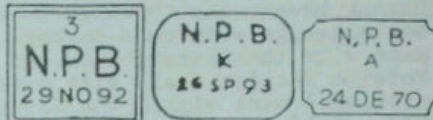


Fig.72 Fig.73 Fig.74

The Newspaper Branch also had postmarks intended for other uses, such as packet marks, which on occasion were used on printed matter.

They are shown later in this study. →

Printed paper postmarks of the Bedford Street office



Fig.75

Fig.75 shows an unusual type of mark for printed matter, which was used only at the Bedford Street post office. Code letters so far seen run from A to D.

Why this branch office should have had its own series of printed paper marks, in addition to those provided by the London Chief office, is a mystery. However, for the sake of completion, these postmarks naturally belong here. The marks were not used for very long (in the 1880s) and they are found on Penny Lilacs (SG 170-4).



Fig.76

One final postmark should be mentioned here, which turns up on larger items of printed matter. It resembles the Bedford Street "B.S." mark (see above) but the bars are vertical. Here also, there must have been a long series of marks; exactly how long cannot be stated, nor the purpose for which these marks were intended.

Foreign Branch, Foreign & Inland Section

The rapid growth in the amount of printed matter handled led to a corresponding growth in the importance of the Foreign Branch of the London Chief Office. By 1859 it had begun to use its own postmark, of the then usual type which incorporated a diamond, and which also featured the letters FB (see Fig.2). Soon afterwards, a similar postmark was used which had the number 12. The passing of the Newspaper Act, governing the delivery of newspapers and magazines, necessitated the introduction of more postmarks which are usually, though not exclusively found on printed matter.

At this time the Inland Section also expanded, and the Foreign Branch became the "Foreign Section". Whilst retaining the same basic design with code numbers and letters, new postmarks were made with the letters F.S., as against I.S. In general, the Foreign Section dealt with overseas mail and the Inland Section with mail sent within the United Kingdom, but in fact, things were not quite so simple, as their duties tended to overlap. Therefore one can find Inland Section postmarks on mail sent abroad.

Foreign Branch

The most frequently used Foreign Branch postmark was that shown in Fig.77, which had no code letter or number. It was still in use in the 20th century, on printed matter as well as on letters, and as both a cancellation and a transit mark. Later a similar type of mark with a number in addition to FB (Nos. 8 and 12) or a letter (A, C, D and M) came into use. According to Brumell, the letters indicated the amount of postage that was to be paid, or the amount that actually was paid. Further types of more-or-less clearly cut handstamps are shown in Figs. 79 to 82.



Fig.77



Fig.78



Fig.79



Fig.80



Fig.81



Fig.82



Fig.83



Fig.84

What seems to be a pair of similar postmarks (Figs.83-84) may not in fact be two distinct postmarks, as what appears to be an outer ring may be the rim of the handstamp, though the example seen is very clearly struck.

The Foreign Branch also had triangular marks, which were used exclusively on printed matter. These are dealt with in the appropriate chapter.→

Foreign Section

Little changed in the appearance of postmarks when the Foreign Branch became the Foreign Section. The code numbers and letters hardly changed, though "W.1." was used in the Foreign Section (Figs. 85 and 86).



Fig. 85



Fig. 86

Together with the standard types can be found a rather unimaginative one, which was used until the 1920s (Fig. 87).



Fig. 87



Fig. 88

The initials F.S. are found on other types of mark, namely the triangular and circular dated types. Later, almost everything was postmarked with them, and so it would be superfluous to deal with them here. The triangular marks are mentioned in the appropriate chapter. →

Inland Section

The postmarks used by the Inland Section, which handled the bulk of the printed matter, were totally different in appearance. The postmarks of other offices were similar in appearance to them, and we give here a selection of the main types.

When looking for distinguishing features we have come across only one type, shown in Fig. 89, which does not have letters, figures or other features, though it can also be found with them. Fig. 90 shows a mark which can be found with the letters E, F, H and S in addition to the B

shown.



Fig. 89



Fig. 90

The similar mark shown in Fig. 91 has been seen with letters E, H, T, V and Z. Fig. 92 shows a mark which, contrasting with Fig. 89, has two triangles in place of the bars.



Fig. 91



Fig. 92

The two "mirror image" marks are especially common (Figs. 93 and 94):

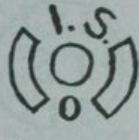


Fig. 93

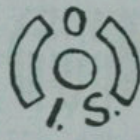


Fig. 94

The following basic design turns up also in other arrangements, and many different code letters have been seen for both.



Fig. 95



Fig. 96

Another similar mark is shown in Fig. 97, with four arcs at the base (letters R, S and U have been seen). Fig. 98 has a figure at the top, though this could be a "2" with the lower stroke missing. Another similar, but larger mark is shown in Fig. 99; the letters D, H, R and U have been seen.



Fig. 97



Fig. 98



Fig. 99



Fig. 100

Two other related marks are shown in Figs. 100 and 101: A crude design which has also been seen with the code letter K, and Fig. 101 which has also been seen with the letter J. In this latter mark, the completeness of the illustration cannot be guaranteed (at the top).

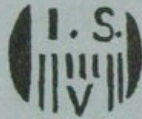


Fig. 101



Fig. 102

Fig. 102 shows another mark with bars; the letters S and R have also been recorded.

Two further marks with vertical bars are scarce; they are shown here:



Fig. 103



Fig. 104

Another two "mirror image" marks, with three bars across the centre are shown here (Figs. 105 and 106); all other horizontally divided marks have only one bar. The following pair of marks is an example; Fig. 108 shows a mark which, like most of the others, has two bars in the upper portion. Fig. 107a

shows a mark without short bars beside "I.S.", and a serial letter at the top.



Fig. 105



Fig. 106

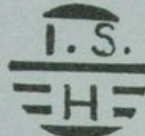


Fig. 107

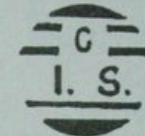


Fig. 107a



Fig. 108



Fig. 109

Two more of these marks, but with additional code letters, and varying size (Fig. 109 and 110):



Fig. 110

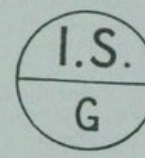


Fig. 111

Two single-ring designs with a short horizontal bar, or a complete one should be mentioned as well as two oddities which are only found in these forms, without any comparable marks.



Fig. 112



Fig. 113



Fig. 114

The London E.C. printed paper marks

The East Central District Office was and is one of the largest post offices in London. It is central to the life of the business quarter and so deals with a great deal of mail - letters, packets and all kinds of printed matter. Nearby are the stock exchange and branches of many banks, also stockbrokers' offices, for which this was the nearest post office.

It follows that large numbers of printed items were sent from here throughout the world, many of them in newspapers. In fact two types of postmark were especially intended for use on these. A circle within a barred oval contained the letters E.C., below which were numbers from 1 to 10 (Fig.114a). Later (from 1862) the diameter of the circle varied from 12 to 14mm., and the range of numbers was expanded - firstly to 50 and later to 88. However, it is questionable whether all the numbers came into use; in particular, Nos. 79 to 82 and 85 to 88 are apparently scarce (Fig.115).

From November 1890, letters began to appear above the circle, between short bars. The reason for this is not clear; Brumell records the following combinations of numbers and letters:

A = 6 to 24, 38 to 49	D = 12, 14 to 16, 46 to 49
B = 11 to 24, 41 to 49	E = 12, 14 to 16, 46 to 49
C = 11 to 16, 19 to 24, 41 to 49	

On the basis of my own material I can add that the letters were used with postmarks whose numbers continued to the end of the series, that is, numbers in the 80s. These postmarks had a relatively long period of use, and can still be found on stamps from the reign of King George V (Fig.116).

Around 1870 a cancellation came into use which had the letters E.C. in the upper part of a barred oval (Fig.117). Under this can be found letters from A to N, except for E and I which were omitted intentionally. A narrower type can be found (Fig.118) but it cannot be stated with certainty if all the letters exist - though this may be assumed.

Finally, Fig. 119 shows a figure within a broken central bar. The figures used were 1, 2, 3 and 4. According to Brumell, the following letter/number combinations are known: A (1,2), B (1,2), C(1,2), D(1), F (1,2), G (1,2), H (1), J (1), K (1,2,3,4), L (1,2), M (1,2) and N (1,2,3). I can report nothing in addition to this, and I would therefore agree with Brumell that not all four numbers were used with each letter - at least, nothing more has been recorded.

A few more things are rather curious in regard to these postmarks, for example why the first type was also (or exclusively) used as a transit mark. I have a long series of wrappers, sent to the same address in Germany, on which on the one hand the FB (Foreign Branch) cancellation was used, as well as an E.C. cancellation for printed matter. The question arises, therefore, which postmark was correctly, and which was wrongly applied; and why the double effort was needed.

Just before the turn of the century the E.C. office introduced further types of postmark. Fig. 120 shows a double-ring mark with the letters E.C. and a letter below. All the letters of the

alphabet are known. Figs.120a and 120b are a pair of single-ring E.C. postmarks with letters under and over E.C., which are also found used after 1900. Fig. 121 shows a rather crude barred postmark with a figure over E.C.



Fig.114a



Fig.115



Fig. 116



Fig.117



Fig.118



Fig.119



Fig.120



Fig.120a



Fig.120b



Fig.121

A pair of barred marks have code letters above and below E.C. The latter is known used on printed matter as late as the George V. period. The mark can sometimes be found with thinner bars. (Figs. 122 and 123).



Fig.122



Fig.123

Two rather attractive marks are shown here. The so-called "boot-heel" type (Fig.124) with the code letter is also known used at other places, including some colonial post offices. Also 28 mm. in diameter is a postmark that, unfortunately, was not in use for very long.



Fig.124



Fig.125

Fig.126 shows a postmark which was originally intended for use on postcards (and can sometimes be found thus used, struck in blue) but it was also used on wrappers. How extensive the series was cannot be stated - the numbers 7, 11 and 12 have been seen.

Finally, Fig 127 shows a mark typical of the 1930s. Similar types were often used on parcels and will be described in this section. →



Fig.126



Fig.127

A note regarding the mark shown in Fig 120: this was often used for pre-cancelling wrappers, so as to simplify the handling of these items. They were issued, ready cancelled, on demand to customers to save time so as to catch the next mail train.

Private postmarks for pre-cancelling mail

Share prices that were constantly changing, charitable organisations which wanted to send their members a calendar of events, publishers who wanted to send people brochures with their latest publications, the number of different items printed grew immeasurably. And all the customers wanted their own particular items of mail to be delivered quickly. The post office therefore soon became unable to cope, without finding new methods to satisfy the expectations of its clients.

Arrangements were made with several firms, with the object of reducing costs and speeding up the dispatch of mail. According to Alcock & Holland, in 1865 the firm of Smith, Elder & Co. was given the privilege of cancelling their own mail, and pre-sorting the items and taking them directly to the main post office or the railway station. The postmark that they used is shown in Fig. 128.

The banking firm of Henry S. King & Co followed in 1868. According to Westley's book "The Postal Cancellations of London", this firm printed the official bulletin of share prices. Their postmark is shown in Fig. 129.

The firm of W.H. Smith was allowed to use four different postmarks for its purposes, with which circulars were postmarked, but also letters and packets. Figs. 130 to 133 show the various designs.

Another firm - William Dawson & Sons - used its own postmarks (Figs. 134 and 135). As was the case with W.H. Smith (Fig. 132) a letter "F" can be found under the firm's initials; according to Brumell this stood for "Foreign". This type of mark is indeed found only on mail sent abroad, and in the case of the Wm. Dawson & Sons' postmark, it is known that it went first to the Foreign Branch of the London Chief Office, before being taken over by Dawson & Sons.

Fig. 136 shows a postmark from a series which was originally intended for use all over England and Wales. However, it is known that the numbers from 1 to 6 came into use at the Foreign Branch of the London Chief Office in 1860. The postmarks are often found on W.H. Smith wrappers, though they are known on other items of mail. The initials T.O. would seem to indicate "travelling office", that is a railway T.P.O., but this is not definite. The same type of mark exists in the form of a vertical oval - it was reported to me from Vienna. Brumell knew of the postmark's existence, but had not seen it during his own research.

It is probable that all the postmarks shown here were intended for the precancelling of private mail items, the vast majority of which were printed matter.



Fig. 128

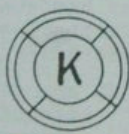


Fig. 129



Fig. 130



Fig. 131



Fig. 132



Fig. 133



Fig. 134



Fig. 135

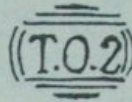


Fig. 136



Fig. 137

"Dumb" postmarks

When postmarking mail it frequently happened that there were a few items which escaped being cancelled, or whose frankings were missed during the process of cancelling. The Newspaper Branch of the Inland Section handled the largest amount of mail, and it was here that, in 1870, special postmarks were introduced for the late cancelling of items that had not been cancelled in the normal way. Figs. 138 and 139 show two of these marks, which have no inscription - only the diamond shapes indicate their use in London.

A variety of other types of mark soon followed, most of them being circular or oval, having long bars (Figs. 140 and 141) or in a "pie" shape (Fig. 142). Such postmarks are still in use today, though they are less frequently needed, as most items are now machine-cancelled.

We mention these postmarks here because they are often found on printed items, in particular gas, water and electricity bills, which were accepted at reduced postage rates.



Fig. 138



Fig. 139

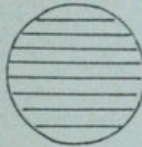


Fig. 140



Fig. 141



Fig. 142

The postmark with the longest period of use



Fig. 143

It is not the oldest postmark used on printed matter in London, but it was in use for about 100 years at the London Chief Office. The earliest example of this type that we have seen is dated 24 April 1873, and the most recent 17 April 1969. Although almost unchanged during a century of use, close examination of the various types reveals varying numbers of arcs around the edge, also different arrangements of collection times and code letters above LONDON. Brumell records a type with a thick horizontal line under LONDON, the date below this and a code letter above.

After about 1930 these postmarks no longer had code letters, but there was a number below the date. Such postmarks are found on packets and airmail items, thereby on high-value stamps.

London triangular marks

In order to give ordinary printed circulars and advertising material a different appearance, these began to be printed in what appeared to be typewritten characters - the typewriter having recently become very popular. After some initial disagreements between the Post Office and its customers, the Post Office allowed customers to post this sort of material at the reduced printed paper rate. It was hoped that this would make the recipient feel that this was personal correspondence.

From 1892 postcards, letters and wrappers thus printed could be posted as printed matter, but the Post Office did not want to lose its specific right to examine this type of printed matter. Therefore new postmarks were needed - the triangular marks.

When preparing these postmarks, the date and place-name were dispensed with. Only the telegraph code for the place was given, which consisted of two or three capital letters. Later the index number for the place, as given in the telegraph directory, was used as well.

Before long, machines were fitted with triangular marks, beginning with the Columbia machine in 1904. The triangular die replaced the usual circular mark, which normally had the date and place-name. Later, triangular marks were used on Hey-Dolphin, Krag and Universal machines, where they can also be found used in conjunction with the first "flag" cancellations (slogans).

Handstamps were still used, though mostly for smaller quantities. They can be found used as late as the 1930s. Apart from the initials of the Post Office, in the case of larger offices the postmark number was added, or additional code letters. When they wore out they were replaced by others of the same basic design, which varied only slightly from the earlier ones - notably in the type used for the initials or code numbers.

Five varieties of code lettering occur, for which Brumell gives the following interpretation:

C = collected in time for day mail train
CL = collected in time for night mail train
L = too late (for transmission the same day)
O = quantity delivered for posting: over 5000 items
U = " " " " under 5000 "

Without any guarantee as to completeness, here is a list of the initials of London offices which used triangular marks:

BED or BF Bedford Street	KE King Edward Street
BFH Battersea	ML Mark Lane
BLS Bow Street	MRK Manor Park
BPN Brixton Hill	MTP Mount Pleasant
CAS Camberwell Green	ND Northern District Office
CH+ or CHx Charing Cross	NHD Norwood
CIW Clapham Common	NW North Western District Office
EAL Earl's Court	PAM Paddington/Spring Street
EC East Central	PBH Peckham
EDO Eastern District Office	SH ? (not identified)
FB Foreign Branch Chief Office	SM St. Martin's Place
FS Foreign Section " "	SW South Western District
IS Inland Section " "	

S Southern District Office
 SE South Eastern District Office
 SSS Stoke Newington
 W Western District Office
 WAM West Brompton

WC West Central District Office
 WD Western District Office
 WKB West Kensington
 WNL Woodford Green
 W.1 Western District Office

The main district offices later used the figure "1", separated from the initial(s) by a full stop, thus SW.1, W.1, SE.1. The reason for the full stop was to avoid possible confusion with other offices, for example W.1 or WI (Wigan)

The following are a few examples of triangular marks.

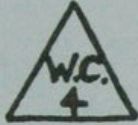


Fig. 144

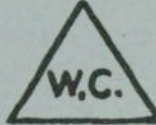


Fig. 145

West Central marks with and without code number.



Fig. 146

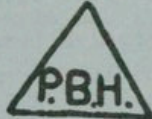


Fig. 147

An SM mark with a number and with breaks in the two sloping sides. The highest number seen is 131. The MTP and FS offices also used this type of number; the highest number seen for MTP is 60, and for FS 90. Also a PBH mark with full stops after the initials (Fig. 147).



Fig. 148

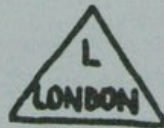


Fig. 149

London Chief Office marks with "C" and "L" (see above notes).



Fig. 150



Fig. 151

A unique negative triangular type is that of SM (the highest number seen is 26). It was mostly used as a "killer" to obliterate the stamp and make its re-use impossible. Also the only recorded triangular mark with circle, used at the MTP office. It is unknown if this mark had a particular use.



Fig. 152

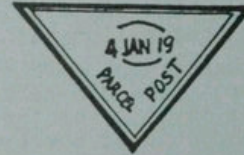


Fig. 153

As previously mentioned, the Post Office retained the right to examine printed items whose style resembled typewritten characters. Inspectors used inverted triangular marks to indicate that they had done their work (Fig. 152).

And as a curiosity, an inverted triangular mark with a date! This was used on smaller packets in the Parcel Section.

Handstamps used at district, branch and suburban offices

From 1870 single-ring postmarks with the date, time and code letter/number were used for cancelling printed matter. The initials of the district office appeared at first in the lower portion of a 24mm diameter circle, and later in the upper portion of a 27mm diameter one. The type with the initials below is only known from the S.W. office (Fig.154) which later adopted the type with initials above (Fig.155).

Branch and suburban offices which came under the district offices used marks with figures instead of letters in the upper portion, as was already the case with the series of duplex marks. Small offices which came under the branch offices had a "B" after the number. The highest ordinary number that has been seen is 109, and the highest with a B is 59B.

Figs 157 and 158 show the features by which these marks can be distinguished. Sometimes they can be found with only two horizontal lines instead of four. In the case of the higher numbers both types sometimes exist.

Apart from the letters E.C. (where different postmarks were used), one might also search in vain for N.E., as by the time these postmarks were introduced, the Northeast office had been discontinued.

The initials found on these postmarks stand for the following district offices:

W.C. = West Central	N.W. = Northwest
W. = West	C.X. = Charing Cross
S.E. = Southeast	S.M.P. = Saint Martin's
E. = East	B.S. = Bedford Street
N. = North	P. = Paddington
S.W. = Southwest	

The numbers for branch and suburban offices have so far not been determined. I would venture to suggest that they mostly correspond with the numbers found on the duplex marks used by the same offices. Numbers which became redundant on the closing of offices or collection points were then given to new offices, and one could often lose track of them. A few consecutive numbers may not have been permanently allocated to particular offices; they were passed around according to need, or remained in the main post office's cupboard.

Dates of use later than 1905 are scarce, and the postmarks had gone out of use before 1920.

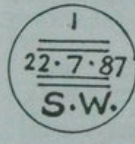


Fig.154

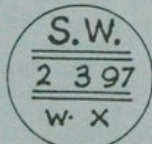


Fig.155

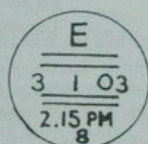


Fig.156

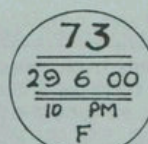


Fig.157

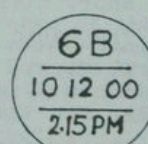


Fig.158

Parcel postmarks

With the help of our members I recently tried to compile an inventory of early parcel postmarks, which are missing from most catalogues. With the large quantity of material made available to me then, I was at least able to put together a representative cross-section of London marks. As these postmarks were very often used on printed matter - especially heavier items - they belong here.

After negotiations between the railway companies and the Post Office in regard to the carrying of parcels, an agreement came into force on 1 August 1883, whereby the railways received 55% of the money paid for transporting parcels. This agreement applied only to inland parcels. The conditions were later adapted and extended, so as to apply to the carrying of parcels to the colonies and abroad.

For inland parcels, labels were introduced which accompanied the parcels, on which the address of the accepting office could be seen, and with spaces for the stamps and, on the back, the address of the recipient (Fig.159).

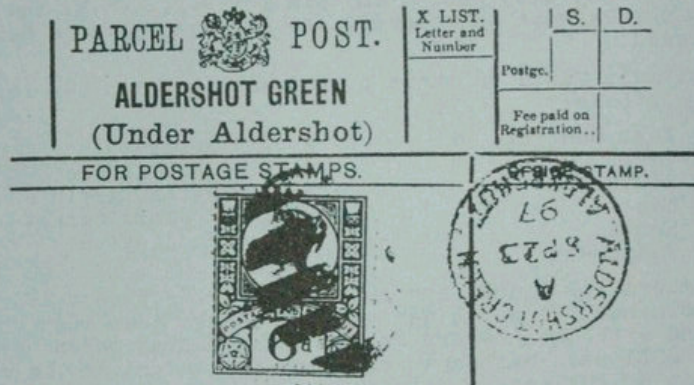


Fig.159

In its appropriate space near the datestamp, the franking was cancelled with a parcel postmark of varying design. The labels were fastened to the parcel with string, on cards which were often lost. In view of this, the labels went out of use within a short time.

The basic design of these marks was as follows:

At first, the commonest marks were double-ring types for main offices (Fig.160) and district/branch offices (Fig.161) - see also the list of post offices which used them.

The former has just initials, the latter the full name of the office, together with abbreviations such as S.O. (sorting office), B.O. (branch office) and often the district such as E.C., W.C. etc.



Fig.160



Fig.161

The London Chief office was an exception. For ordinary parcels there

was a series of marks with figures above or below the name of the office. We can only speculate as to whether or not this arrangement had the same meaning as that of the letters O and U in the case of triangular marks - see this section.



Fig. 162



Fig. 163

Pairs of similar marks were used by the Newspaper Branch and the Inland Section, in series with code letters. The complete alphabet must have been used, though this has not been proved.



Fig. 164



Fig. 165



Fig. 166

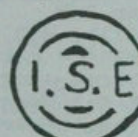


Fig. 167

Single-ring marks with horizontal lines followed; these did not make such a mess of the stamps as had their predecessors. Branch post offices and larger offices included their names and abbreviations, as had been done previously with the double-ring types.



Fig. 168



Fig. 169

Shortly afterwards the diameter of the marks was increased and different types appeared whose

purpose remains unclear (Figs. 170 and 171).



Fig. 170



Fig. 171

Postmarks as shown in Figs. 172 and 173 followed, some made of rubber, for all the larger London offices. They have code numbers and the appropriate office name. These marks are still used today, especially on post-buses.



Fig. 172



Fig. 173

The different arrangements of bars in the following types indicate the collection times - why one of them (a postmark used at the correct time for the night train) should have the letters "CL" is a mystery.



Fig. 174



Fig. 175



Fig. 176

Finally, these postmarks of the Foreign Section are often found from the 1930s (the Foreign Branch had been dissolved by this time). They can be found used into the Second World War period.



Fig. 177



Fig. 178

The following list of post offices which used these postmarks is not complete. Any additions, together with relevant photocopies are always welcome. It seems clear that a great many of the 180+ post offices in London at the turn of the century used, at least for a time, postmarks of these types, which can often be found struck in violet. The list given here is restricted to those offices from which I have seen clearly legible postmarks.

Main, regional and sorting offices in London

CHARING CROSS
 EASTERN DEPOT
 E.D.O. (Eastern District Office)
 G.P.O. (General Post Office)
 G.P.O. Depot (different types)
 I.S. (+ Code) (Inland Section)
 LONDON CHIEF OFFICE (different types)
 LONDON CHIEF OFFICE (error)
 LONDON W. (West)
 N.D.O. (Northern District Office)
 N.W. Parcel Office
 N.P.B. (+ Code) (also Code + N.P.B.) Newspaper Branch
 S.W.D.O. (South Western District Office)
 T.P.O. Depot (Travelling Post Office)
 W.C.D.O. (Western Central District Office)
 W.D.O. (Western District Office)

Branch and suburban Post Offices

Aldermanbury B.O., E.C.
 Aldgate B.O., E.C.
 Barbican Road, E.C.
 Barnes S.W.
 Battersea S.W.
 Bedford St., B.O., E.C.
 Bedford St. B.O., W.C.
 Bethnal Green S.O.
 Camberwell
 Cannon St., B.O., E.C.
 47 Cannon St., B.O., E.C.
 Charing Cross B.O., W.C.
 210 City Road, E.C.
 Clerkenwell St., E.C.
 Coleman St., E.C.
 Covent Garden E.C.
 Eastcheap B.O., E.C.
 Enfield
 Finsbury Pavement B.O., E.C.
 Finsbury Square B.O., E.C.
 Fleet St., B.O., E.C.
 Fore Street E.C.
 20, Fore St., E.C.

Fulham, S.W.
 Gracechurch St., B.O., E.C.
 Great Tower St., W.C.
 Great Queen St., W.C.
 Hampstead, N.W.
 Hatton Garden, B.O., E.C.
 Hatton Garden S. 110
 Herne Hill S.E.
 Highbury N.
 High Wycombe
 Homerton S.O., E.
 King's Road B.O.
 Leadenhall St., B.O., E.C.
 Lester St. B.O., W.C.
 Lombard St., B.O., E.C.
 London Bridge
 Loughton
 Ludgate Circus B.O.
 Mark Lane B.O., E.C.
 N.1, City Road B.O.
 North Finchley S.O./N
 Peckham
 Peckham S.E.
 Piccadilly B.O., E.C.
 Poplar
 Queen Victoria St., B.O., E.C.
 Regent St. Heddon St. W.1
 21 Regent St.
 Rotherhithe B.O., E.C.
 Sandhurst Road S.E., B.O.
 Smithfield Market E.C.
 Smithfield Market B.O., E.C.
 Southgate, W.
 South Kensington
 Stockwell
 60, Strand B.O., W.C.
 Sundry Pavement B.O., E.C.
 Tabernacle St., E.C.
 Threadneedle St., B.O., E.C.
 Union St., Southwark/S.E.
 Victoria Docks S.O., E.
 Victoria St., S.W.
 Walforth S.O.
 Waterloo
 West Brompton, E.C.
 Woolwich

Various oddities



Fig. 179

Similar in design to Figs. 87, 120a and 120b, this single-ring mark was used from about 1900 at the General Post Office, without any additional information in the design. It is the only known printed paper mark of this type used at the G.P.O.

A postmark of the "Parcel & Freight Office". This comprised parcel & freight sections within the same office. The postmarks had serial numbers for each division; this is the type of mark used for parcels.

As to the origin (Fig. 181) and the complete design (Fig. 182) in readiness for a future edition. His address is given below.

Author's note

The purpose and nature of this booklet are indicated by its sub-title: it is a guide for collectors, which will help them in building their collections, and at the same time will assist in forming a systematic arrangement.

When one considers that many of the illustrated types had between 20 and 100 varieties, it is not an exaggeration to regard a "good representative collection" as consisting of over 2,000 stamps, pieces or covers. Most of the collections that I have seen - including my own - are not of this size, but to acquire the necessary material may be within each collector's reach.

As well as giving a systematic classification of the marks, the illustrations are numbered so as to facilitate exchanges between collectors.

At the end of the booklet, I have left a space for notes. Please use this space to add things which are not included in the guide - photocopies of new types, different sizes or styles, also different code letters or numbers. When a page is full, please send me a photocopy for a possible future edition.

I have taken pains to give reasons for the introduction of whole series of postmarks. The understanding of this can be helpful when forming a collection. Also - in case you have not already noticed - the whole of the text has been typed on an ancient "Wanderer Continental" typewriter, in the typestyle (Clarendon) which I mentioned on page 21 at the beginning of the chapter on triangular marks.

Curt N. Fernau, Postfach 237, 78340 Gaienhofen, Germany.



Fig. 180



Fig. 181

This printed paper mark of the London type with "E H" and a code number remains unexplained. It is the only one recorded, dating from c. 1912 (Fig. 181).

This is the only known example of an I.S. (Inland Section) mark that has been seen, with a code letter in the centre and with the inscription evidently incomplete at the base. It seems clear that there was indeed a gap here.

As, at the time of printing, the marks shown in Figs. 181 & 182 remain unexplained, the author would welcome clarification.



Fig. 182