The Five Pound Stamp of G.B., and its Usage

By Comdr. M. S. L. Burnett

The Telegraph Stamp

A set of four values, 1d., 3d., 1s., and 5s. stamps was issued on February 1st., 1876 for use on telegrams. The reason for this issue was that the Post Office had no way of distinguishing between revenue from postal services and revenue from the telegraph service, which had been taken over from the private telegraph companies on February 4th., 1870. Critics of the Government were asking whether the £5 million paid in compensation to these companies had been justified by the increase in Post Office revenue.

Additional values to this set of Telegraph stamps became necessary owing to the varying rates—up to £1.5s. a word to Peru—and the 4d., 6d., 3s., 10s., £1 and £5 values were issued on March 1st., 1877. This article deals only with the £5 stamp, first as a Telegraph stamp, and from March 21st., 1882 as a Postage stamp, the word "TELEGRAMS" having been drilled out of the plate and the word "POSTAGE" inserted in its place, the spaces either end being filled in with "ornaments".

The Postage Stamp

The £5 Postage stamp had a life of 21 years, until 1902, and indeed, could still be bought in a few London Post Offices in the 20th. It was printed on paper watermarked Double Anchor, not the Multiple Shamrocks of the Telegraph £5. The usage was for high value telegrams and for accounting purposes between Telegraph and Money Order Offices and the Accounts Branch of the G.P.O. It was extensively used in Glasgow and Edinburgh between 1894 and 1896, and in Belfast from 1888 to 1895, probably as a form of receipt for payment of Excise Duty by distilleries in Scotland and Northern Ireland, in the same sort of way as the 10s. and £1 K.E.VII stamps were used to prepay duty on tobacco from Guernsey. I very much doubt whether the £5 stamp was ever used for postage (as was the New Guinean £5 stamp, which is in the 1930s franked registered parcels of bullion by air mail to Australia).

Printing, Sales and Auction Realisations

The total number of £5 Telegraph stamps printed was 1,500 sheets, or 64,000 stamps, and there is no record of the number returned for destruction when Telegraph stamps were invalidated in 1881. The Telegraph stamp is much rarer, both unused and used, than the £5 Postage stamp, which had a printing of 4,467 sheets, or 246,826 stamps, during its life of 21 years.

I list on page 481 the number of stamps sold in each year from 1882 to 1897. I have also listed by each year from 1877 to 1905 the 641 copies which are the raw material on which this article is based. These 641 £5 stamp photographs have been taken from Auction catalogues issued between 1937 and 1973. During those 24 years the Auction realisations have moved progressively upwards, as follows:

1937-1943, £4-£10 Average of 10 lots: 170
1944-1959, £12-£20: 84
1960-1968, £23-£48: 84

The Rectangular Boxed Cancellers

Between 1878 and 1892 some of the £5 stamps have a rectangular, boxed cancel, in addition to the circular date-stamp. This contains the initial letters of the Accounts Branch at the G.P.O. which received the stamp in payment from the Telegraph Office which applied the circular date-stamp. This defacement, not popular with collectors, affects 49 of the 205 stamps dated during these 14 years.

The four types found on the £5 stamp are illustrated (B1 to B4), and were used as follows:

Type B1: T.M.B./G.P.O.; Telegraph Message Branch/General Post Office.
I have examined nine examples, dated between JA 22 78 and JUL 23 85. All have the c.d.s. of a London Office:
PARLIAMENT ST. S.W.
CORNHILL B.O. E.C.
LONDON WESTERN OFFICE (3)
LONDON CLEARING HOUSE BRANCH
ST MARTIN'S LE GRAND, E.C.
WEST STRAND B.O. W.C. (2)
HEALTH EXHIBITION, S.W.

Of this type, 30 examples are dated between JY 18 82 and SP 18 91. Ten of these have the c.d.s. of a London Office:
VERE ST. B.O. S.W.
UPPER THAMES ST. E.C.
HIGH HOLBORN D.O. W.C.
HIGH RD. KNIGHTSBRIDGE. S.W.
NOTTING HILL. WEST HILL ST.
LONDON N.
LONDON N.W.
LONDON S.W.
LONDON NORTH WEST CENTRAL OFFICE.
GLoucester RD. NR. HEREFORD SQ. S.W.
Of this type, 10 of them originate in the Midlands:
MANCHESTER TELEGRAPH (2), BIRMINGHAM (4), LEEDS (2), SHEFFIELD, LIVERPOOL.

(Continued on page 475)
Usage of the £5 G.B. (continued from page 472)

A further 10 of them are date-stamped at, or near, the coast, and I can find no theory to explain this:

- Ventnor, Folkestone, Portsmouth, Plymouth, Tiverton, Portmadoc, Bath, West Hartlepool, Langport, Bideford.

Type B3: P.A.B. / R. & A.G.O. Pay /& Accounts Branch / - T -

The three examples of this boxed initials are dated between DE 1866 and JO 13 88 and all have the Liverpool C.D.S.

Type B4: T.A.B. /EDINR. Telegraph Accounts Branch /

Type C1: T.A.B. / EDINR. Telegraph Accounts Branch /

Type C2: T.A.B. / EDINR. Telegraph Accounts Branch /

Three examples of this boxed initials hand-stamp, dated between NO 29 83 and NO 28 89, are date-stamped Blackhall St, Greenock, Paisley and Glasgow.

Six of the boxes seen had initials which were indecipherable.

The "Whisky" Stamps

A total of 239 stamps was studied with date-stamps between 1893 and 1896, and over 80% of them were cancelled in Glasgow, Edinburgh or Belfast:

Type A1 Glasgow, 1894-1896 157
Type A2/3 Edinburgh, 1893-1896 36
Type A4 Belfast, 1885-1895 81
Total 274

Type A5

Type A6

Manchester Accounts and Account Branch P.O. Glasgow
Between 1890 and 1897 there were 26 examples of the double circle Manchester Account date-stamp. (Type A.5)
This is a cancellation often found on the top values, 10s. and £1, of Queen Victoria, overprinted i.a. Official.
The most commonly found date-stamp on these two Official stamps is the oval ACCOUNT BRANCH P.O. GLASGOW date-stamp (at Type A.6) I have 32 examples of the 10s., and 44 of the £1 with this Glasgow Account Branch oval date stamp, taken from Auction Catalogues, and all are dated October 1892 or October 1894.
The same Glasgow Account cancellation occurs on the £5 stamp in October and November 1894 only.
The highest value of the Official stamps of Queen Victoria was £1, and it would be natural to use, when accounting for large sums of Official Revenue, the £5 postage stamp in place of five copies of the £1 i.a. Official.

The London Offices

Between 1882 and 1898 a number of London Office date-stamps are found on the £5 stamps. This includes:

- London: N., E., N.E., N.W., S.E., S.W., W.C.
- South Eastern District
- South Western District
- West Central Office
- North West Central Office
- West Central District Office W.C.

Branch Offices:

- Victoria St. S.W.
- Easieiahp E.C.
- Mark Lane E.C.
- West Strand W.C.

District Offices:

- Cornwall E.C.
- Vere St. W.
- High Holborn W.C.
- High Rd., Knightsbridge
- Great Portland St., W.C.
- Gloucester Rd., N. Hereford Sq.
- S.W.
- Notting Hill, W.
- Upper Thames St., E.C.
- No. 12 Parliament St., S.W.
- Health Exhibition, S.W.
- St. Martin's-le-Grand.
- Charing Cross, W.C.

(Continued on page 481)
Usage of the £5 G.B. (continued from page 473)

The "Whisky" Stamps (see above) 274
Manchester Accounts 26
London Offices 46
Liverpool, Leeds, Birmingham 21
Other Scottish towns 10
The English Coastal Towns (see B 2) 10
Others 74
Total 461

"Registered Threadneedle St.
B.O. E.C." oval date-stamp

(Types A1, A7)

The "REGISTERED THREADNEEDLE ST. B.O. E.C." oval date-stamp is found between 1895 and 1902. Of the 37 copies recorded, 29 of them are dated in 1899. This does not indicate the posting of a registered packet. The Telegraph Account Branch was situated in Threadneedle St. E.C., and it was probably the date-stamp chosen to cancel £5 stamps used in the Accounts Office in Threadneedle Street, London E.C. (Type A7).

Other similar type Registered oval date-stamps found are:
REGISTERED GRACECHURCH ST. E.C. 1895-1902.
6 examples.
REGISTERED LONDON CHIEF OFFICE, 1897-1899.
4 examples.
REGISTERED CHATHAM HOUSE, 1 example

C.D.S. of English Towns and Money Order Offices

Between 1899 and 1903 there was a complete change in the pattern of usage of the £5 stamp. The date-stamps summarised above for 461 stamps used between 1878 and 1897 disappeared almost entirely. Instead of these we have in a sample of 174 stamps recorded during the five years 1899-1903.

106 stamps with c.d.s. of English towns.
28 stamps with c.d.s. of Money Order & Savings Bank Offices.

40 stamps "Registered" described above.

The Money Order & Saving Bank Stamps have, in addition to the name of the town, either: M.O. & S.B.; M.O.O., or as asterisk (*) embodied in the date-stamp.

Town c.d.s.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Town</th>
<th>c.d.s.</th>
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<tr>
<td>ALDERSHOTT</td>
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<tr>
<td>BATH</td>
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<tr>
<td>BLACKBURN</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BRADFORD, Yorks.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BURNLEY</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>BURTON-ON-TRENT</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>CAMBRIDGE</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHELTENHAM</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>CHESTER</td>
<td>20</td>
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<tr>
<td>DARLINGTON</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>DERRY</td>
<td>8</td>
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<td>EMESTER</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>GLOUCESTER</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>NEWPORT, Mon.</td>
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<tr>
<td>PLYMOUTH</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>SHEFFIELD</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>SOUTHAMPTON</td>
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<tr>
<td>TUNBRIDGE WELLS</td>
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<tr>
<td>WALSSAL</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>WARRINGTON</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>WORCESTER</td>
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Overall Summary

Year | Copies seen | No. with additional boxed cancel | No. of copies sold
-----|-------------|----------------------------------|---------------------
1877 | 1           | —                                | (Telegraph)         |
1878 | 5           | 3                                | (Telegraph)         |
1881 | 2           | 2                                | (Telegraph)         |
1882 | 28          | 1                                | 6,570               |
1883 | 10          | 2                                | 8,753               |
1884 | 10          | 3                                | 9,294               |
1885 | 4           | 2                                | 12,072              |
1886 | 15          | 2                                | 12,632              |
1887 | 8           | 7                                | 11,908              |
1888 | 30          | 12                               | 12,861              |
1889 | 23          | 8                                | 13,191              |
1890 | 8           | —                                | 14,269              |
1891 | 27          | 3                                | 15,786              |
1892 | 38          | 1                                | 17,012              |
1893 | 31          | —                                | 16,346              |
1894 | 89          | 3                                | 18,079              |
1895 | 68          | —                                | 22,523              |
1896 | 51          | —                                | 22,797              |
1897 | 16          | —                                | 16,822              |
1898 | 5           | —                                | (4,992)             |
1899 | 62          | —                                | —                   |
1900 | 62          | —                                | —                   |
1901 | 9           | —                                | —                   |
1902 | 34          | —                                | —                   |
1903 | 7           | —                                | —                   |
1905 | 1           | —                                | —                   |

Totals 641 49

Money Order and Savings Bank c.d.s.

ASHFORD Kent M.O. & S.B. 1
BURTON-ON-TRENT M.O. & S.B. 1
BRIGHTON M.O. & S.B. 2
CAMBRIDGE M.O. & S.B. 1
CHELTENHAM 3
CRANE M.O. & S.B. 7
CROYDON 1
GREAT YARMOUTH 3
HARTING M.O. & S.B. 1
HEREFORD M.O. & S.B. 1
HUNTINGDON 1
READING 3
WARRINGTON M.O.O. 1
WEST HARLOW 2

For those who want a fine-looking copy of the £5 stamp, I can recommend those described in this paragraph. The orange colour was bright, and the date-stamps light and distinct. They do not suffer from crayon lines or boxed rectangles, but sometimes from creasing.

The Orange Colour and the Blued Paper

Although not distinguishable in the auction photographs, the colour of the £5 stamp varies considerably. It started in 1877 as bright orange, but the shade became dull orange in 1881, and was orange-buff in 1882, when the "POSTAGE" £5 was issued. The buff shade of 1882 lasted till 1884, when the blued paper of 1882 changed to white.

This blue paper is distinguishable in most of the 1882 and 1883 stamps, though there are some which are definitely on white paper. I believe the reason to be that the chemical substance which caused the blue paper affected only the sheets on top of the pile, and failed to penetrate to those at the bottom. Although the blued paper has catalogue status,

(Continued on page 483)
Usage of the £5 G.B. (continued from page 481)

1 should have preferred to see the distinctive shade of buff, apparent in all stamps used in 1882-3, to the paper colouring, which affects some of the stamps in the same issue.

In 1898 the orange colour became brighter, and the best and brightest colours are found in the 1890 to 1893 stamps.

Conclusions and Finale

A stamp like the Great Britain £5, which could be bought in 1940 for £5, and is now worth £100 for a fine copy, can be said to have kept up with inflation.

A wise buyer does not spend money on a refrigerator, or a motor car, without first satisfying himself that the money is well spent. This article is intended to show a prospective buyer some of the points he should look for in a £5 orange stamp. There are many pitfalls, but I have taken the reader through the life of this stamp, and suggested to him that the usage of some years gives a better buy than the usage of others.

I have a preference for early usage, without the boxed initials, and a dislike of the "Whisky" stamps of 1894 to 1896, especially with crayon removed; 1885, 1887, 1898 and 1901 are the scarce years, about which I should like to know more: 1900 and 1902 look best in the album. I hope this article helps you with your choice.

Acknowledgements

To Cyril Harmer, of H. R. Harmer Ltd. for lending me his auction photographs, and enabling me to re-write with 641 stamps what I had written with 450.

To all the other Auction Houses for their catalogues, from which I was able to collect 450 photographs.