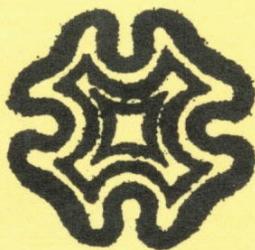


Rowland Hill's famous letter to
the Chancellor of the Exchequer 2 Nov. 1839
outlining his plan for the gradual
implementation of Postal Reform

Reginald M. Phillips' collection



Price 1/6.

FOREWORD

In his endeavours to document as comprehensively as possible the history of the adhesive postage stamp Mr. Reginald M Phillips, of Brighton, acquired a unique holograph draft of Rowland Hill's letter to the Chancellor of the Exchequer dated 2 November 1839 which details his plan for the gradual introduction of the postal reforms with which his name will ever be associated. This priceless manuscript, together with the rest of his collection Mr Phillips gave to the National Postal Museum, which he founded.

A document of such importance deserves rather more careful study than cursory perusal. It is therefore reproduced in type in this booklet together with this note about its significance in the history of the post at that time. Rowland Hill, whose advocacy of Postal Reform bore fruit in the Postage Duties Bill which received the Royal assent on 17 August 1839, was employed temporarily as advisor on Postal matters at the Treasury from 16 September 1839 until 14 September 1842. The Chancellor, Francis Baring, made it plain to him at the outset that whereas he would have access to the Post Office and every facility of enquiry his channel of communication would be to the Treasury, from which any directions to the Post Office would be issued.

Hill accepted this restriction – he was obliged to use the official machinery of communication.

Having visited France in October Rowland Hill applied himself to the introduction of penny postage and the putting of the Post Office in order for the expected flood of letters before the floodgates were opened. The interim scheme he recommended to the chancellor is the subject of the draft letter under discussion.

Francis Baring accepted the plan, which while not disturbing the local penny post involved the abandonment of the earlier general post charges based on the distance a letter was carried, and substituted a general four penny post, the prepayment of postage and a tariff based on the weight of the letters. This interim scheme introduced on the 5 December 1839 was designed to test the organisation at St. Martin's Le Grand in anticipation of the pre-paid weight based penny post scheme, which was the ultimate objective.

This trial scheme having been successful penny postage extended to the whole kingdom on 10 January 1840. It was however still necessary to pre-pay the postage in cash when handing letters to Post Office clerks stationed at wicket windows in Post Offices. The clerks endorsed the letters 'paid' or 'postage paid' / 'PP'. This clumsy arrangement continued until stamps and prepaid postal stationary were placed on sale for use from the 5 May 1840.

That is another story

Introduction of the penny postage

Treas^y NOV 2/39

Sir

Having last night carefully gone over with Mess^{rs} Bokenham & Smith the mem. of yesterday' date with reference to the first steps to be taken under the New Postage Act I am now prepared to submit for y^r considⁿ my views on the subject in a more complete form.

In adopting these views I have been influenced by the follow^g consid^{ns}.

1st, That it is important that the whole measure should be brought into operation as rapidly as is consistent with the mature consideration, & efficient execution of each part

2nd, That the convenience of the public will be consulted by making the steps in the introduction of the measure as few as possible – if it were practicable to bring the whole measure into operation at once such an arrange^t w^d no doubt be most acceptable to the public, but this for many reasons w^d be extremely difficult even if the present state of the London office (through w^h nearly half of the correspondence of the kingdom passes) were favourable for so great & sudden a change, but as the building is rightly complained of by the officials as being very much too small for even the present amount of business, it is clear that until more space is obtained it would be very unsafe to take any steps which would lead to a great increase of letters – Besides the time required for the

preparation of the stamp renders it necessary either to postpone operations altogether or to adopt some intermediate course.

As therefore the adoption of an intermediate measure will not delay the introduction of this whole plan – on the contrary the experience it will afford will rather accelerate the introduction – there can be no doubt, I imagine, of the expediency of such a course,

The intermediate measure to be adopted ought I am of the opinion to possess the following requisites.

1st. It should be of sufficiently decided character to satisfy public expectation.

2nd. It should not only as a whole be a step towards the final measure, but every individual alteration involved in it should lead in that direction, in order, that hereafter there may be nothing to undo.

3rd. It must be independent of the use of stamps.

4th. It must not involve the necessity of any immediate extensions beyond what is already in progress of the Office in St. Martins Le Grand.

5th. While for the reasons already assigned it must not bring about any very considerable increase of letters, it should if possible be such as to indicate with tolerable accuracy the probable increase hereafter – in order that the necessary additions if any to the present force may be provided in due time.

6th. It should as far as practicable simplify the operation of the P.O. so as in some degree at least, to compensate for whatever increase of business may take place.

7th. The measure should in some degree test the practicability of prepayment.

8th. It should introduce the practice of charging by weight in as much as this being a charge which will undoubtedly be attended with considerable trouble to the P.O. in the first instance, it is important that it should take place while the number of letters is comparatively small.

9th. Any part of the measure which is experimental or in the working of which modifications may be necessary should if practicable be tried first in the London office.

And lastly it should be such as not to deprive the final step when taken of its due share of popularity.

The follow^g measure appears to me to possess these requisites in the highest possible degree – you will observe that (with the exception that I do not now propose to close the letter boxes earlier than at present) it is substantially the same as that suggested in the mem of yesterday. This exception is made at the suggestion of M^r Bokenham who is of opinion that the previous practice in weighing will render the early closing of the letter boxes unnecessary.

In the London District Post, hitherto called the 2^{dny} and 3^{dny} Post.,

- 1 Let all letters not exceeding $\frac{1}{2}$ an oz in w^t whether for the 3 mile or 12 mile circle be charged 1^d each, provided the postage be prepaid.
- 2 Let the 2^{dny} rate, on G.P. letters delivered beyond the 3 mile circle be abolished.
- 3 Let all other arrangem^{ts}, connected with this post continue as at present.

In the General Post.

- 4 Fix the maximum single postage at 4^d. The inferior rate of 2^d for distances not exceeding 8 miles continuing as at present.
- 5 Let all extra postage charges whatever be abolished as for instance the add^l 1^d for the Penny Posts the $\frac{1}{2}$ on Scotch letters the 1^d for passing the Menai and Conway bridges & c.
- 6 Let all letters be charged by w^t according to the following scale :-

Not exceeding $\frac{1}{2}$ an oz	1 Postage
“	1 oz 2 Postage
“	2 oz 4 Postage
“	3 oz 6 Postage

 and so on adding 2 postages for every add^l oz.
- 7 Require that all packets exceeding One Ounce weight shall be prepaid.

Foreign and Ship Letters

- 8 Apply the same scale of weight to the British charge on Foreign and Ship letters and extend the maximum of 4^d to the Inland postage on the same – in all other respects continue the present charges (The inland postage on Outward Ship letters is already a uniform rate of 4^d. On Inward Ship letters the rate is variable).
- 9 Let the arrangem^{ts} extend to the whole of the British Isles, including the Isle of Man and Guernsey Jersey and the other Channel Islands. The Inland rate as it has been called including the sea postage between one part of the Kingdom and another.
- 10 Let them come into operation on Thursday the 5th of Dec^r next, that is to say, let them apply to all letters posted on or after that day.
- 11 As these measures will undoubtedly have the effect of increasing to some degree the number of letters it will be necessary to take care that any additional fees of the Duputy Post-Masters or others receive at those on late letters for instance shall be carried to the General revenue. The payments to the masters of Ships should at the same time be reduced – say to one penny per letter.

Remarks on the above

I w^d recom^d that in taking the necessary steps under the Act to give effect to these arrangem^{ts} the public be clearly informed that they are merely preparatory to the est^t of a uniform Penny rate, and that the reasons for delaying the complete adoption of the plan be fully stated.

(Article 3) The operations of the London District Post w^d be somewhat simplified by reducing the charge for the unpaid letters of the present 3^{dny} district to 2^d., but I think it would be better to reserve all further reductions till such time as the general scale of charge by w^t is applied to this post, as such application will have the effect of increasing the charges on the heavier packets very considerably.

(Article 4) A maximum single postage of 4^d would, as far as the London office is concerned, be absolutely uniform, and it may be worth consideration whether advantage may not be taken of this circumstance to reduce the labors of the office by inserting the charge (4^d) in the journal Stamp and thus combining the Stamping and Taxing processes – an 8^d letter w^d be stamped doubly and a 1^{s/-} letter triply, beyond this it w^d probably be convenient to write the charge.

(Article 6) A scale of w^t ascending by greater steps w^d undoubtedly be somewhat more convenient for the P.O., but it w^d, I fear, lead to a vexations anxiety on the part of the public to avoid passing certain stages in the scale in order to escape the great increase of charge

and it would increase the temptation to divide heavy packets of certain weights into two or more lighter ones – I have not proposed to fix any limit to the w^t of prepaid packets – at present there is no limit even to unpaid packets. If it sh^d be thought expedient to fix a limit, it can be done when the rate is reduced to One Penny per ½ oz. If it sh^d be considered necessary to give the P.O. practice in weighing letters before the increase of letters comes on, charge by w^t might precede by a week or a fortnight the proposed reduction in the rate of postage.

(Article 7) Optional payment sh^d not I think extend to greater weights than 1 oz. At present such weights are rarely sent through the P.O. but a reduced rate w^d increase their number and the withdrawal of the option hereafter might be attended with difficulty – Besides the restriction will protect the office from occasional conveyance of heavy packets as at present for which nothing is received.

Mr. Bokenham is of opinion evening duty w^d be very much facilitated if an arrangement which he considers practicable could be adopted for bringing the great mass of letters from Gov^t Offices to the P.O. by 7 O'clock. He is apprehensive that the morning delivery may be delayed under the proposed arrangem^{ts} perhaps by half an hour, until the office which is much too small for even the present business shall have been enlarged. With respect to the enlargement of the office I take the liberty of again stating my opinion that it will be inexpedient to incur any expense which may hereafter create an obstacle to the est^{nt} of District Offices such according to the plan which I proposed for the 2^{dny} p.

Dep^t to the Comm^{rs} of P.O. Inquiry (vide 9th reposrt).
This plan is equally applicable to the distribution of G.P. letters; and believing that its adoption will greatly improve the Metropolitan delivery, I am exceedingly anxious that nothing should be done to interfere with its adoption when the progress of the general measure shall admit of the necessary attention being paid to the less important details – These observations do not apply to the proposed improvements in the ventilation of the P.O. a measure w^h I consider very desirable even if the number of men employed in the principle office were reduced.

I also think it my duty to suggest that should it be considered necessary to make any addition to the present force, all new engagements may be temporary, in order that the force may be reduced, if when the new arrangements have been fully tried, such reduction be found practicable.

I have & c

R. H.

The following is added in pencil

P.S.

Nov 7. I have delayed forwarding the above report till this day in order to keep it open for any suggestions w^h Col. Maberly might wish to make with reference to the mem. Of the 1st Inst.