



PHILATELIC OPINION

MIKE JACKSON

PHILATELIST

No. 0153

August 2013

3 COTTESMORE AVENUE MELTON MOWBRAY LEICESTERSHIRE LE13 0HY ENGLAND
mike@mjpublications.com

ITEM DESCRIPTION

1840 1d black QL on cover originally from China.

OBSERVATIONS

Comparisons with the letter positions and descriptions in Nissen indicate that the stamp is from Plate 5, which was put to press on 28 May 1840. The stamp shows the right side extending beyond the bottom, as described by Nissen.

The letter was written by Clem. A. Edwards on 22 March 1841 on board HMS *Rattlesnake* on the 'Canton River, Bocca Tigris' during the 'First Opium War'. The letter begins 'I cannot allow the mail by HMS *Samarang* to close without giving you a few lines . . .'; and Edwards duly endorsed his letter 'Eastern Expedition' 'Per H.M.S. "Samarang"'. The letter is addressed to his sister in Weston-super-Mare, and includes fascinating descriptions of what was happening in the region at the time. It is Letter No. E18 in Scamp's 'Log of the Edwards Correspondence', Appendix 40-E, p. 392.

HMS *Samarang* arrived at Portsmouth on 17 August 1841. There are no Portsmouth markings, so the letter must have gone straight to London where the SHIP LETTER mark was applied, and '8' written in black ink for an unpaid incoming ship letter.

A MS note on the back of the letter reads 'found in Loui's music book just now' ('Louisa' is mentioned in the letter).





I believe the following account explains the dates on the postmarks, the note on the back, the lack of redirection, and the reason for a postage stamp.

The letter arrived at the address as normal (nearly post town of Cross c.d.s. of 19 Aug. 1841), but was accidentally placed unopened in the music book, which was taken by friend or family to Clifton. When it was found two months later, the explanation was noted on the back, the 8d charge and endorsements on the front crossed out and a 1d black affixed to pay the postage. The letter was reposted in Clifton (undated circular mark), cancelled in Bristol (20 Oct. 1841 c.d.s.) and arrived at Cross (feint Oct. c.d.s.) for delivery in Weston-super-Mare. The address was the same, hence no redirection.

The characteristic ink and uneven letter spacing of the Bristol c.d.s. has been seen on another cover, dated 28 October 1841 (see Fig. 1).

Regarding the black Maltese Cross cancelling the 1d black, although the portions of the cancellation that are on the cover at top and right of the stamp do not exactly conform to the orientation of the cross on the stamp, my experiments with a replica Maltese Cross handstamp (see Rockoff & Jackson, Vol. 2, pp. 358–360) lead me to believe it is possible that the clerk's use of the obliterator could have resulted in such marks. Also, there is ink in the right margin of the stamp near the top which supports this. Although Bristol did not use a distinctive cross, the cross on the stamp conforms generally to the type of Common cross found on dated covers from Bristol (see Rockoff & Jackson, Vol. 1, pp. 57–59).



Fig. 1

SOURCES

Charles Nissen, *The Plating of the Penny Black Postage Stamp of Great Britain 1840, 1922*.

Colin Tabeart, *Robertson Revisited*, 1997.

Lee C. Scamp, *Far East Mail Ship Itineraries*, 1997.

S. David Rockoff & Mike Jackson, *Encyclopaedia of the Maltese Cross*, Vol. 1, 2006; Vol. 2, 2008.

Stanley Gibbons, *Great Britain Specialised Catalogue*, Vol. 1, 16th edn, 2011.

CONCLUSION

In my opinion, the cover, originally posted in China, bears an 1840 1d black QL Plate 5 cancelled in Bristol, and is genuine, and a very unusual item. SG Spec. AS25.

Mike Jackson

MIKE JACKSON