



Evolving Bishop Marks in Scotland's Postal History



Purpose

This is an exhibit about the evolution of the Scottish Bishop marks from an early oval primitive design to progressively larger markings. All types are shown.

This exhibit will also show changes in how and why the datestamps were used from 1693 to 1806.

The Bishop Mark

The first Scottish datestamp was modeled after those used in England. Postal historians call this datestamp the Bishop mark for Henry Bishop, England's Postmaster General. He introduced the mark.

The Reason for the Datestamp

To provide accountability, the datestamp would show that the post office was not delaying mail.

Restricted Use of the Mark

The oval Bishop marks of Scotland were only used on letters to London. Only the Edinburgh post office used the mark. At the time, Scotland's population was only 10% of England's. Widespread poverty and illiteracy limited use of mails in the 1700s.

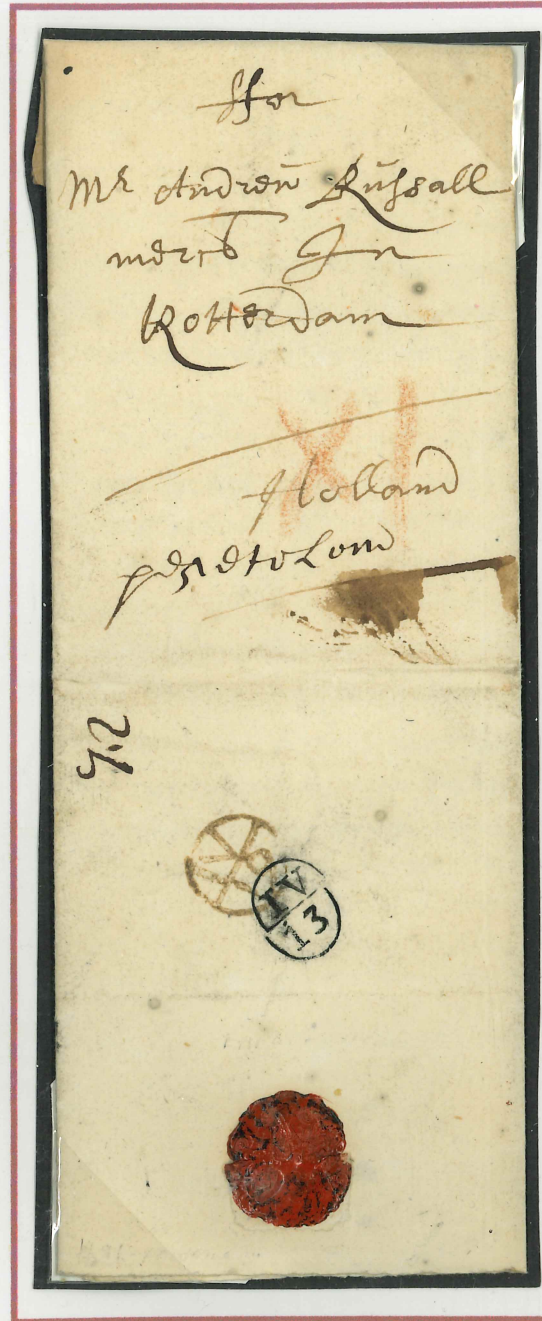


Exhibit Plan

I. The Oval Bishop Mark	1-4
II. Small Circular Mark	5-7
III. Large Circular Mark	8-12
IV. Large Unbroken Circle	13-14
V. Replacement Marks	15
VI. Epilogue	16

Background: Early Mail Routes

Initially it took six or seven days by horse post for a letter to travel the 300 miles from Edinburgh to London.

A Hundred Years of Use

Business was conducted through the mail, and interest and importance of the datestamp on mail grew. In 1758, the Bishop mark came to be used on mail sent throughout Scotland. Bishop marks were used in England, Scotland, Ireland and British colonies for over 100 years.

References

Scottish Postmarks Mackay
Collect British Postmarks Gibbons
Postal Markings of Scotland Auckland

Significant items boxed in maroon



← Perspective and Research

13 April, 1696 Edinburgh to Rotterdam, Holland
 One of Four Known with pre 1697 early use.
 IV/13 Oval Edinburgh, IV /19 Circular London
 6 days to London, carried by horse post
 5d rate paid to London, manuscript, "pd 5d to Lond"

Manuscript XI - 11 Dutch stuivers for rate to Rotterdam
 Ostende via Antwerp by the Thurn & Taxis Post

Frame 1
 Page 1
 Kathryn Johnson

Evolving **Bishop Marks** in Scotland's Postal History

Synopsis

Purpose

Show all Scottish Bishop marks and demonstrate how and why the datestamps were used.

Title and Treatment

This one frame exhibit shows and describes the steady improvement made to the markings, detailing how they grew larger and clearer in size. The markings themselves are also described as to construction of the devise, alignment of segments, inks used.

Beyond just the physical markings, covers selected illustrate the improvements made in the marking format, and placement and how that changed over time, and care taken making strikes on the mail. While the exhibit is about the Scottish Bishop mark, details the rates and use information is provided as well as identify information about British markings shown.

Subject Completeness

All marking types are presented, along with variations seen in the markings. The exhibit concludes with the markings replacing the Bishop mark after 100 years.

Importance

The Bishop mark is the first postal datestamp. Its use in England is well known. In Scotland, it is the first datestamp marking as well. The use in Scotland was highly limited, it was initially used only in Edinburgh, and only on mail to London. It provides the only date traceability on early Scottish mail.

Knowledge, Study and Research

Interpreting early stampless mail is tricky, early Scottish mail, in particular, provides few markings. Study of the rates, routes and interpretation of the manuscript markings used was required.

Perspective and research is marked with a 

London Bishop marks have been studied in detail, but for Scotland the study is limited as few examples remain to work from. This exhibit expands beyond showing markings and takes a use approach to describe how and why markings change and use evolved.

Fit for a One Frame Exhibit

All four marking types are shown as well as the markings that replaced the Bishop marks at the end of the period of use. In one frame, enough detail is presented to describe the use and how it evolved.

Condition

At a glance you might not see or realize that this exhibit presents covers in excellent condition for this period. Scotland's conditions from a climate standpoint were not optimal for paper preservation, affecting cover condition and later industrial pollutions took their toll.

Covers were selected for their clarity of strike, something few covers have. That said, some of the writing shown is faded owing to inks used at the time. The exhibit presents the better covers from a more extensive collection, just showing what advances the story best.

Rarity

The exhibit is about the first datestamp used in Scotland, and the exhibit starts with an example from after the marking was first introduced. At that time, the population was less than 10% that of England. People of little money, less trust of the post, few were literate.

The main reason for the scarcity, though, was that until 1758 use was only from Edinburgh and only on mail sent initially to London. Few early examples of the Scottish Bishop mark have survived. Mostly what has survived is not of condition to show in an exhibit as the markings are small, inks used were faint or now faded.

In the exhibit, significant items boxed in **maroon**.

What You Won't See

The exhibit is not about markings in the sense of showing a collection of early and latest dates of use of individual markings. This is also not an exhibit about the deterioration of the markings themselves, although comments about how the marking halves aligned or did not align are made.

I. Oval Bishop Mark

Sent from Edinburgh to and via London



Background: Postal Accountability

King Charles II appointed Henry Bishop Postmaster General. Following **complaints of delays** in delivery of letters, the first postal handstamp, the "Bishop mark," was introduced in London as an **accountability** indicator.

Struck in Black
1693—1713

13mm x 10mm

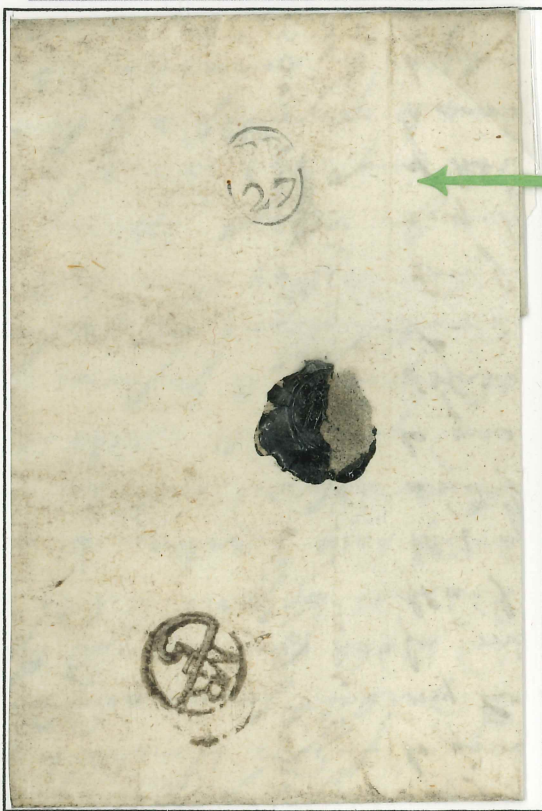
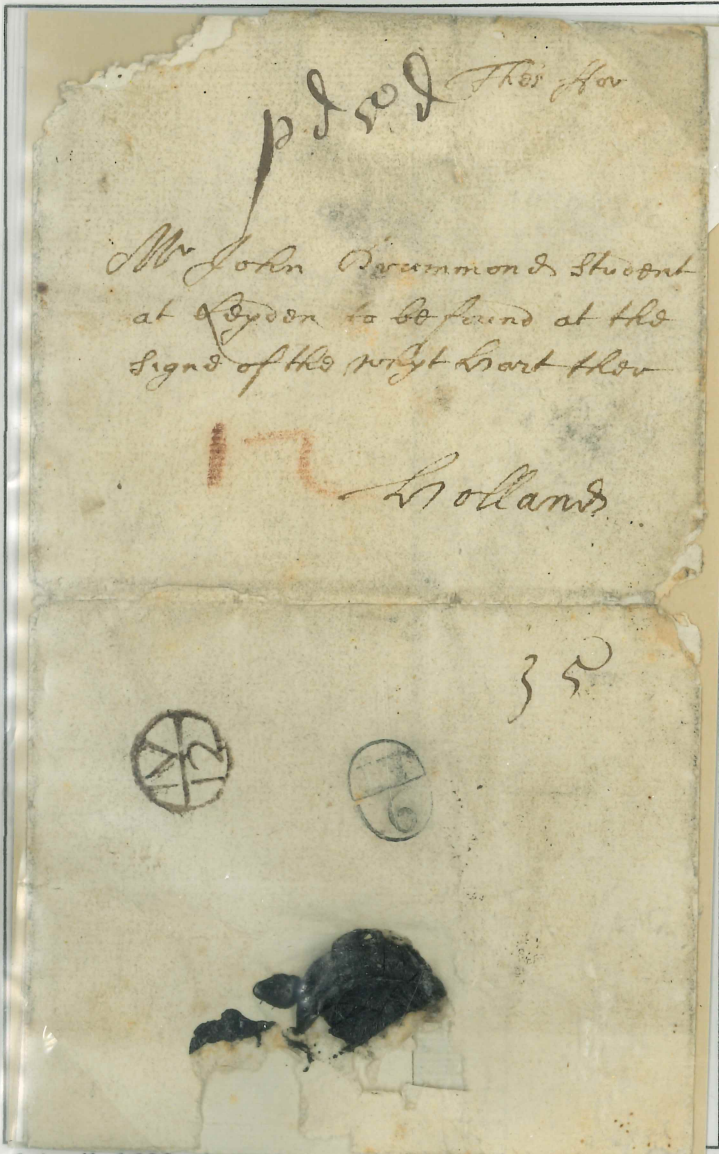
Made from Basswood

When refuting charges of delays in the post, PMG Bishop called for the handstamp use:-
"A stamp is invented, that is putt upon every letter shewing the day of the moneth that every letter comes to this office, so that no letter Carryer may dare to delayne a letter from post to post; which, before, was usual."

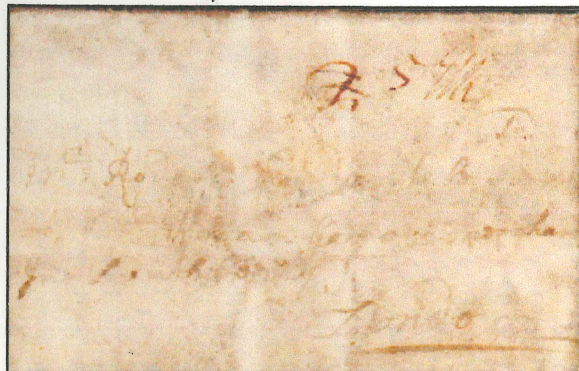
Rate: 5d to London
rate in effect until 1711

Oval Bishop Mark
13mm x 10mm
Marking segments aligned & closed

Oval Bishop Mark
13mm x 10mm
Marking segments aligned and slightly open



27 February, 1703 **FE/27** Edinburgh **MR/5** London
7 days transit, 5d unpaid. Reverse shown, front below.



←Rate Marks
2d Scotland,
re-rated 5d in
London

6 April, 1690s, Edinburgh to Holland, 5d paid to London
Date of use determined by correspondent record, 1690s.
Reverse: Scottish Oval Bishop **IV/6**—April 6
London transit **IV/12**—April 12
Manuscript **12**—12 Stuivers, Holland inland rate.

Scan of cover front, reduced.

I. Oval Bishop Mark

Mail to London and Forwarded

In an effort to make the marking more visible, from 1714 on the oval Scottish Bishop mark was struck in a red. A synthetic ink was used, which remained more distinct than the black linseed oil and carbon ink used earlier.



Struck in Red
1714-1725
13mm x 10mm

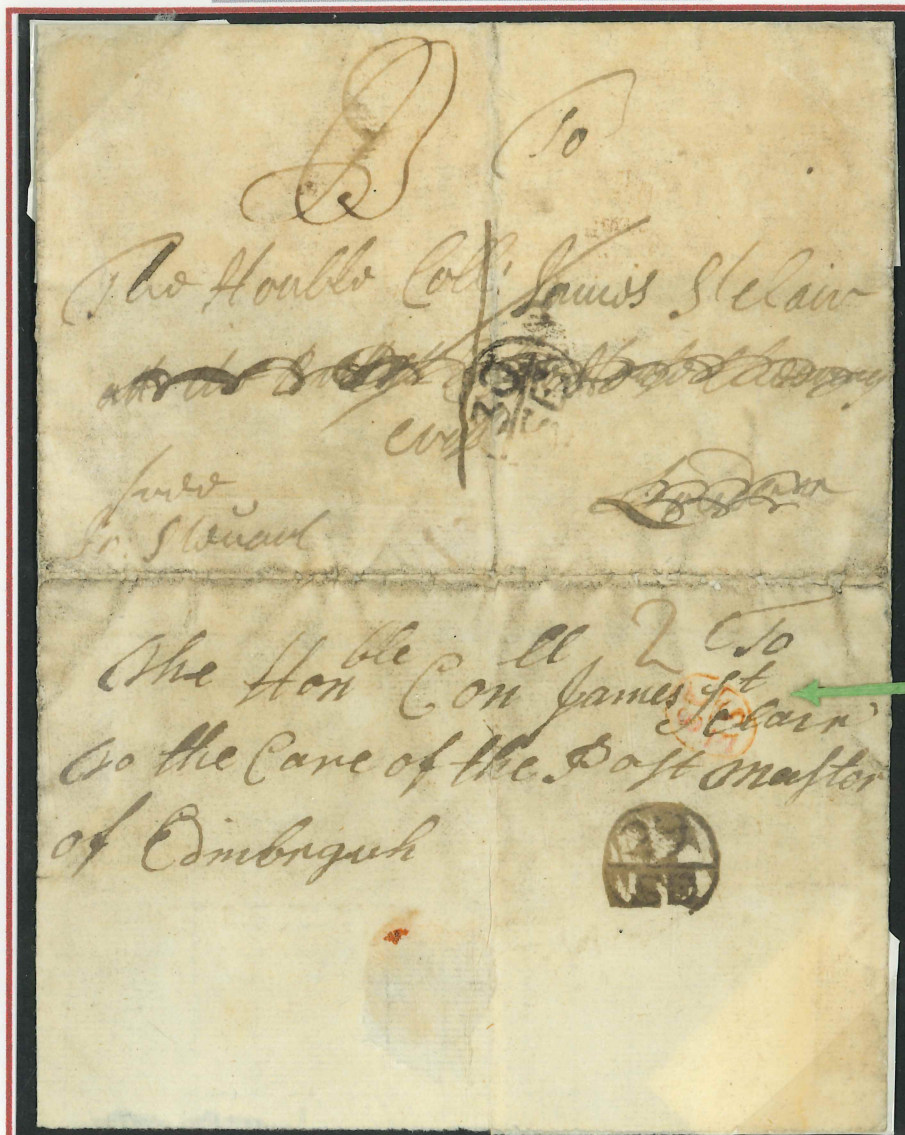
Contrasting Use: the Scottish Bishop mark

- ◆ From 1714 oval mark applied in red ink
- ◆ Used on mail to London, marking below: **SE/23**

The London Bishop mark

- ◆ Applied in black ink using a circular marking
- ◆ Applied to and from London, below: **29/SE** and **30/SE**

Oval Bishop Mark
13mm x 10mm
Top and bottom segments misaligned at left



Addressed →
“In the care of
the Postmaster
of Edinburgh”

Rates:
Rates to London
increased from
5d to 6d in 1711,
then remained
stable for over 50
years.

← London
Marked when
sent **30/SE**
Black Circular

← Scottish
Bishop mark
SE/23
Red Oval

← Black London
29/SE
arrival mark.

23 September, 1721, **SE/23** Edinburgh to London, rate 6d, forwarded to Edinburgh
29/SE London, 6 days. **30/SE** for warding marked in London. Manuscript 2 for
rate amount within England.

I. Oval Bishop Mark

Distinguishing the Markings

Scottish Bishop mark

- ◆ Comprised of two parts, first made of wood
Sometimes misaligned or unlocked

- ◆ The month was always above the day

London Bishop mark

- ◆ Circular single mark, brass ring
- ◆ Month below the day

23 April, 1723→

AP/23 Edinburgh to London

29/AP London, 6 days.

Free Frank, large 6d rate marked off.
Manuscript free mark indication at top.

AP and **23** misaligned:→

Lateral displacement provides evidence of an upper and lower portion of the joined marking.

Oval Bishop Mark

13mm x 10mm

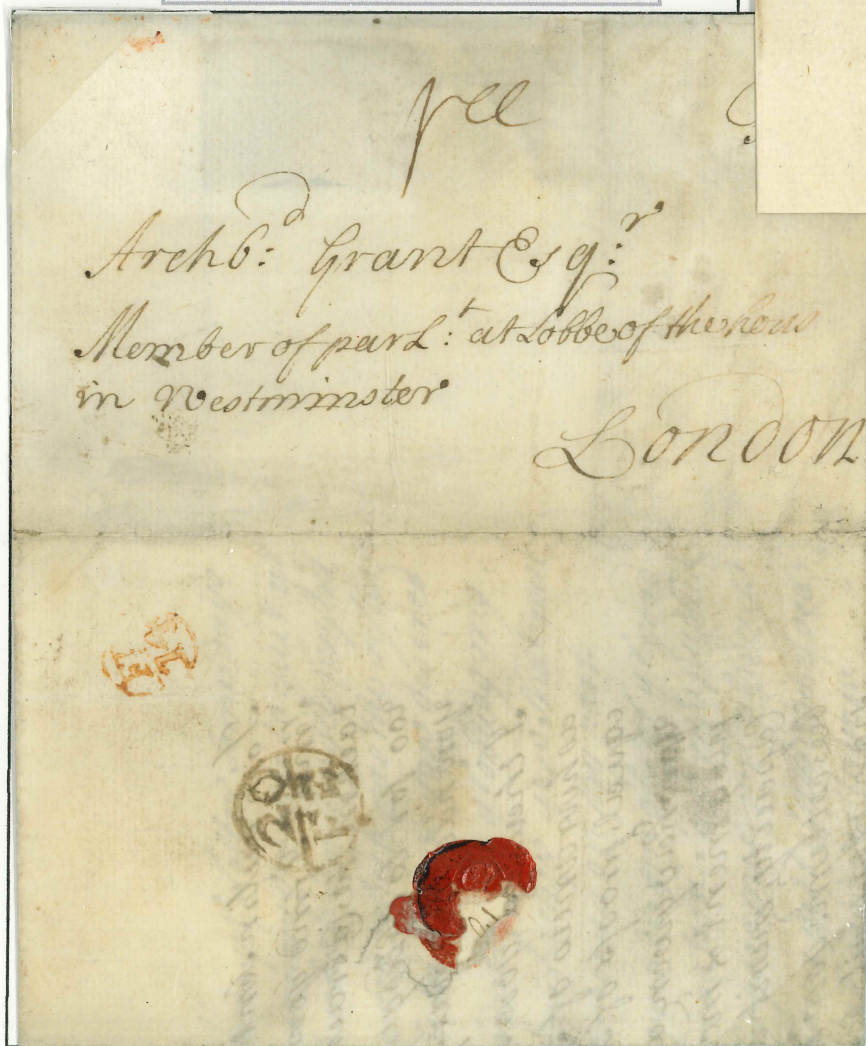
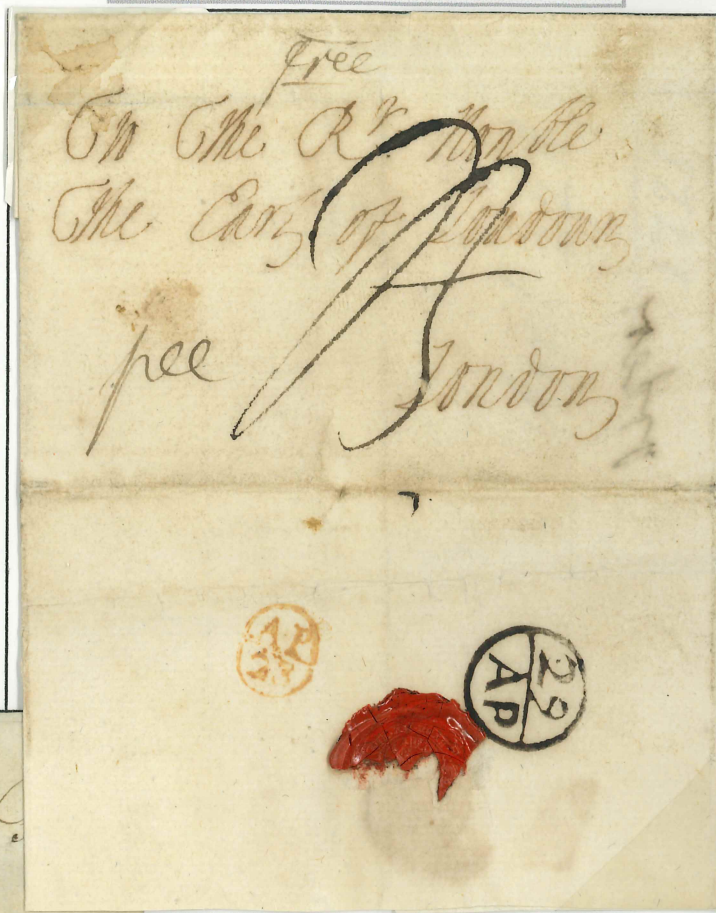
Top and bottom segments aligned

Use on Free Mail, Edinburgh to London

Oval Bishop Mark

13mm x 10mm

Top and bottom segments shifted right .5mm



Free Franking Privilege

Letters to or from members of Parliament. Inscribed "free" by sender, often rated by the post, and rate crossed off at receipt acknowledging the approved use.

Lack of Public Trust in the Post

Public officials and the general population thought the mail was being read by corrupt government officials, accounting for delays.

14 February, 1723

FE/14 Edinburgh, 20/FE London, 6 days.

Free Frank, Duke of Gordon to Parliament.
Manuscript free mark indication at top.

II. Small Circular Bishop Mark

A circular Bishop mark replaced the oval format. Sized larger at 15 mm and comprised of two halves, it was used on mail to London.



1725-1757

15mm

Small Circular Bishop Mark →
15mm
Top and bottom segments aligned

Edinburgh to London to the Earle of London

16 September, 1725→

SE/16 Edinburgh

22/SE London, 7 days

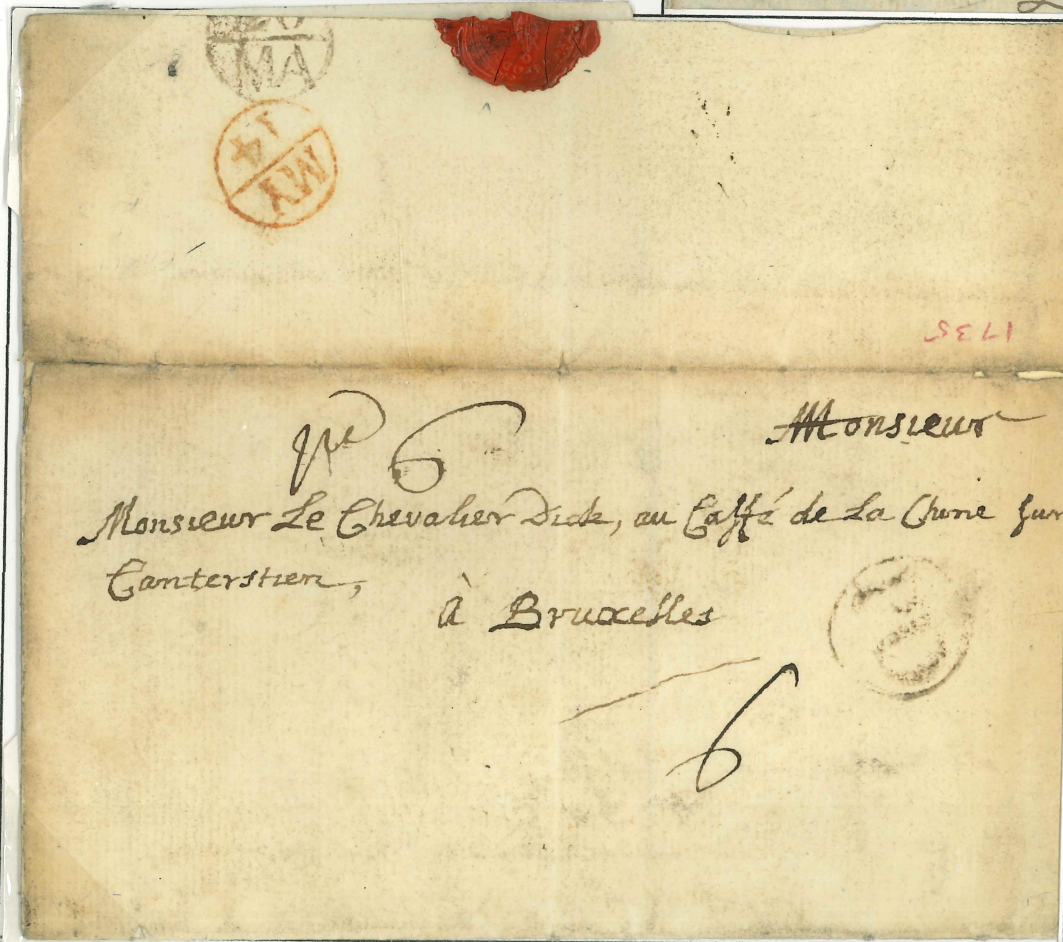
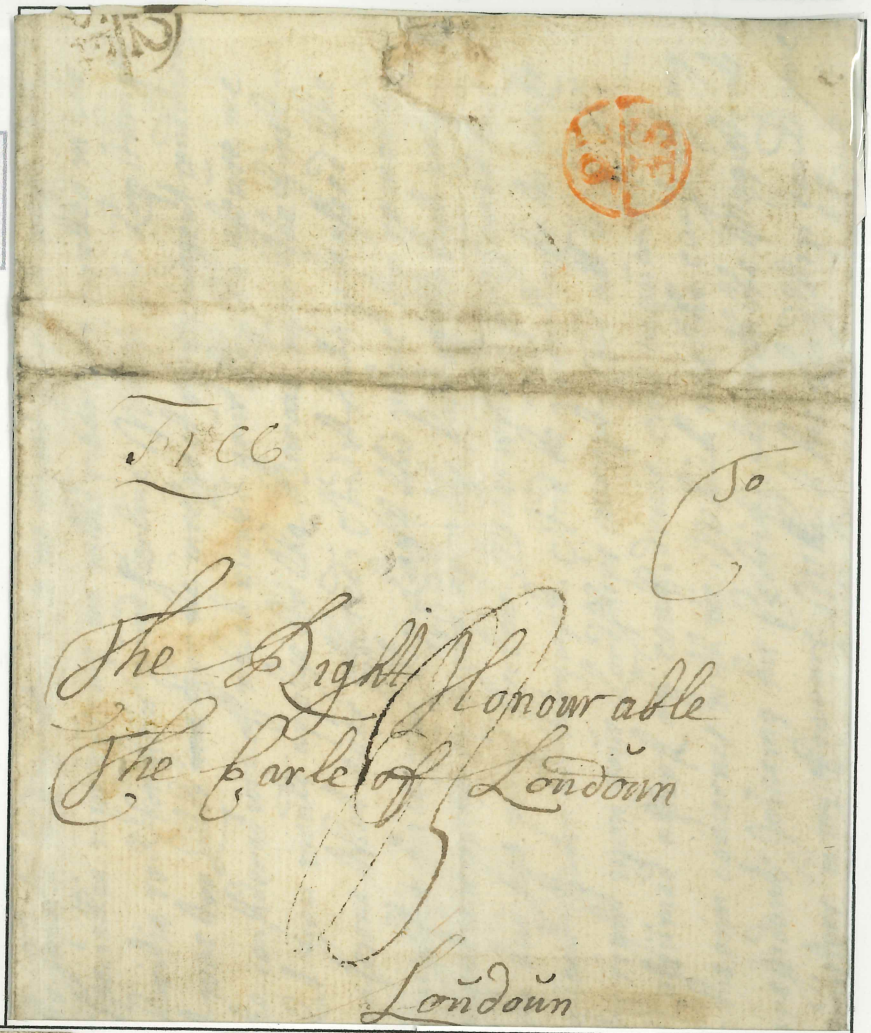
Free Mail to Earle of London

Manuscript free mark,

6d rating marked off.

Small Circular Bishop Mark
15mm
Top and bottom segments shifted left .3mm

Edinburgh Mail to and via London



Edinburgh via London to Brussels, Belgium

← 14 May, 1735

MY/14 Edinburgh

20/MY London

6d rate paid to London,

Marked 6 for onward. Circular
PD London

First type, used 1715 to 1768

Coffee house address, "Au
Caffé de la Chronne"

Coffee houses, inns and taverns
were stops along mail coach
routes in Scotland, England and
Europe.

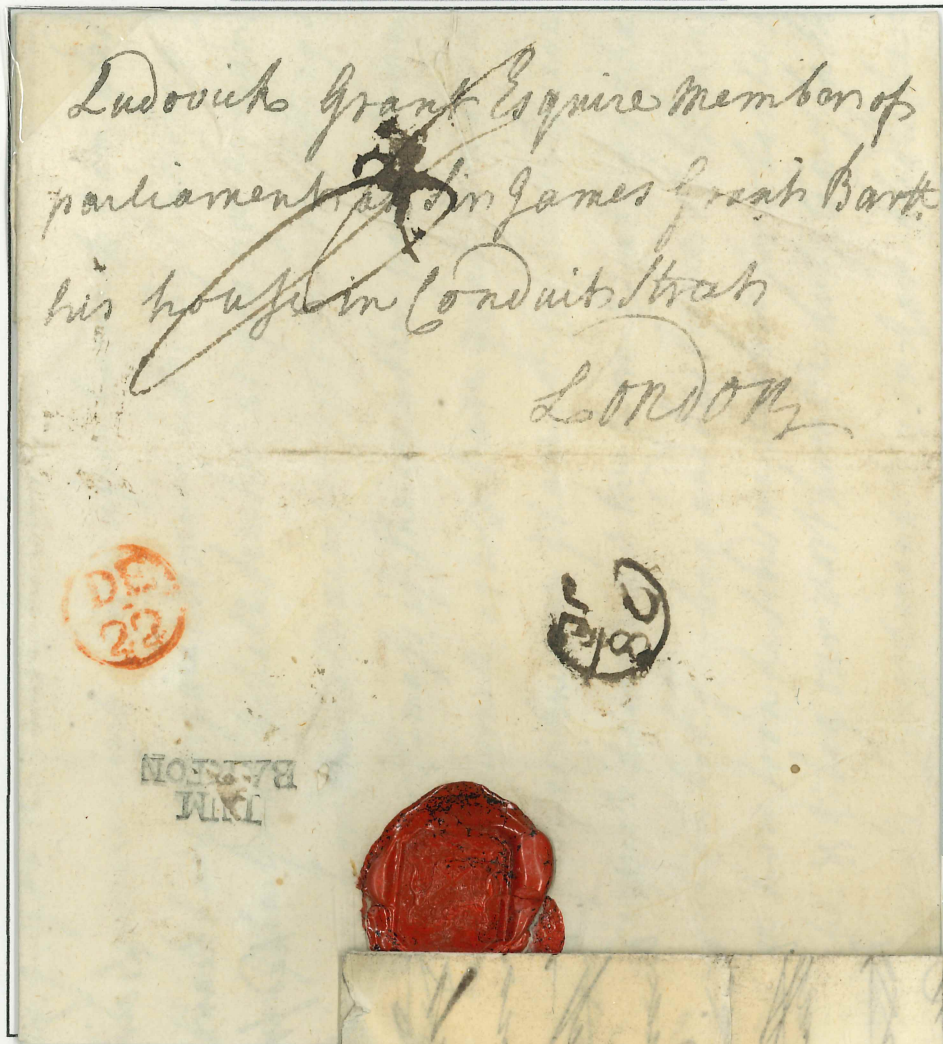
II. Small Circular Bishop Mark

Mail to and from Scottish Towns

Two halves of the Scottish Bishop mark: It was economical. The Post Office had 12 upper half stamps with the months of the year in two letters, and a diameter line, and then 31 half-circles of the dates 1 to 31, with no diameter line. This saved from having 365 different marks.

In 1758 Bishop mark use expanded: marks were used on mail from Edinburgh to destinations within Scotland.

Small Circular Bishop Mark
15mm
Top and bottom segments aligned



Covers Show Restriking of Marks:
♦ For Appropriate Placement
♦ For Clarity of Strike

← Manuscript X over 28/DE
London Bishop mark restruck
for placement and clarity.

22 December, 1743
Dumbarton to London
DE/22 Edinburgh, **28/DE** London
Free mail to Parliament

When Scottish town markings use
began, marking were undated.

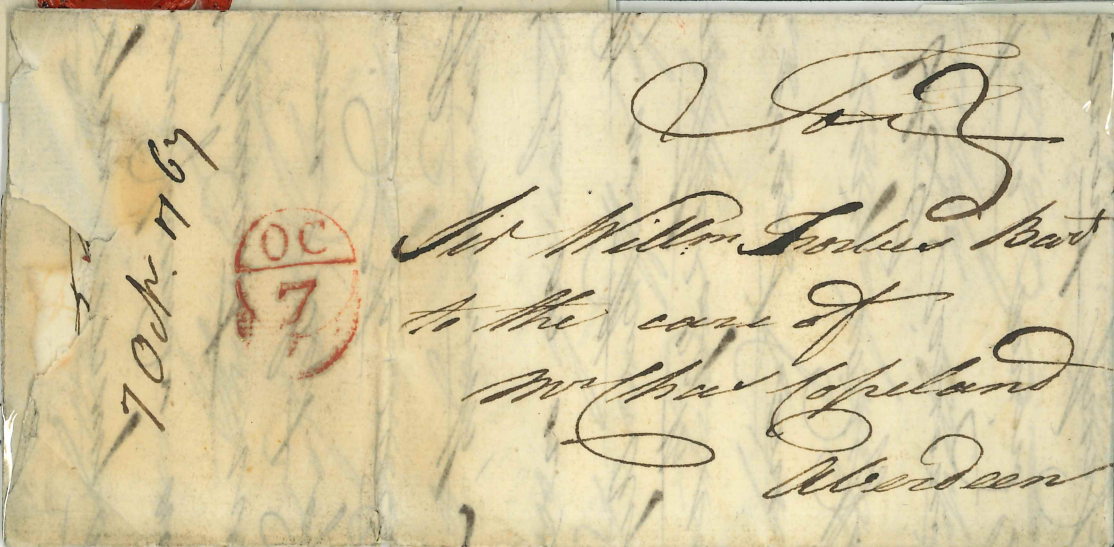
← **DUM**
BARTON

Small Circular Bishop Mark
15mm
Top and bottom open .5mm

New Rates: Effective in
October, 1765: the rate
for to up to 50 mile
raised from 2d to 3d.

OC/7 restruck →
for clarity

From the 1760s on
more care to strikes and
placement is shown.



7 October, 1767, **OC/7** Edinburgh to Aberdeen, 3d manuscript rate, up to 50 miles.

II. Small Circular Bishop Mark

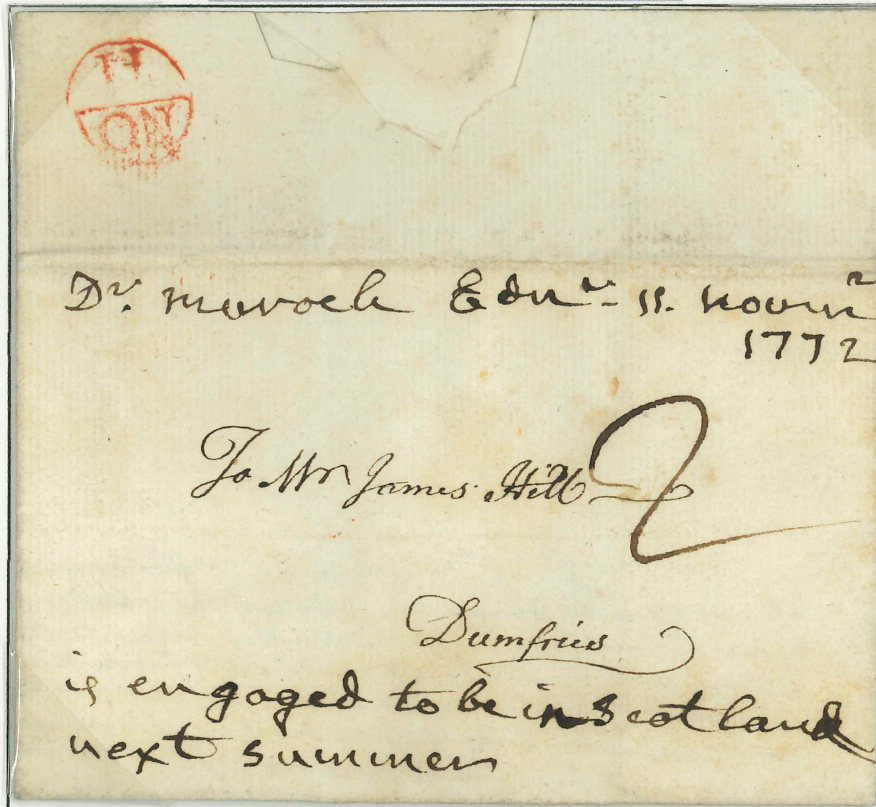
Mail from Edinburgh: Use within Scotland

Beginning in 1758, the Bishop mark use expanded from the initial Edinburgh to London to use from Edinburgh to destinations within Scotland. The interest in *accountability of delivery within Scotland* is tied to the public's perception of slow delivery. Within Scotland roads were primitive and Mail moved slowly, typically only 15 miles a day.

Small Circular Bishop Mark

15mm

Top and bottom segments aligned



11 November, 1772

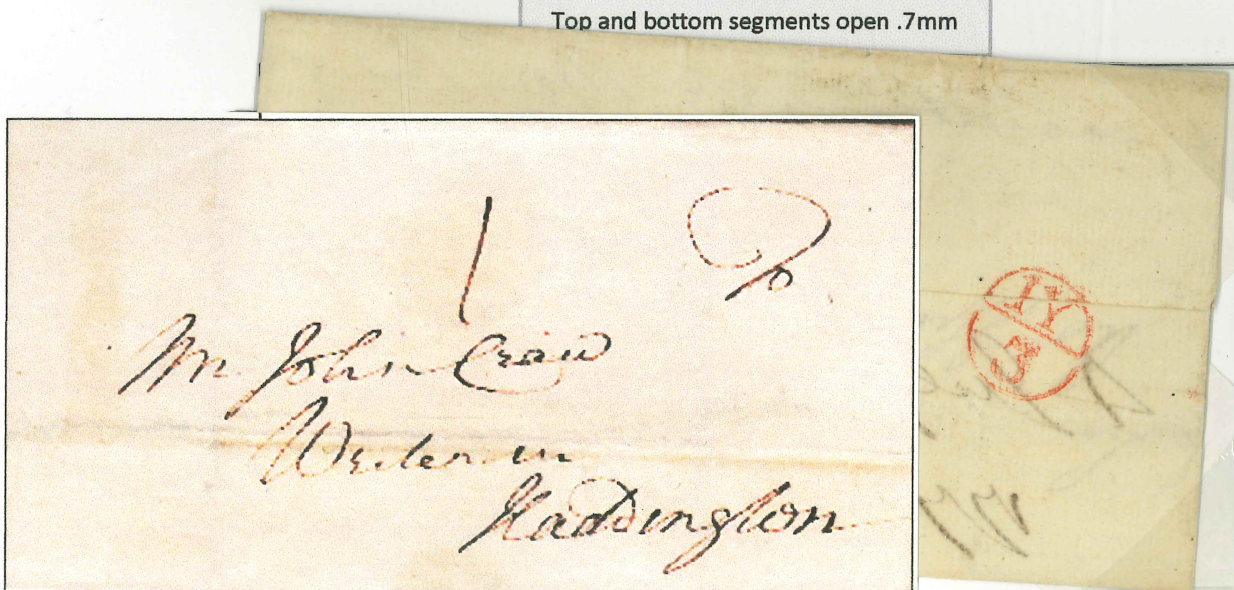
NO/11 Edinburgh to Dumfries
2d manuscript rate due

Dr. Murdock, a traveling physician, writes of delays in seeing patients because of poor road conditions due to rains.

Small Circular Bishop Mark

15mm

Top and bottom segments open .7mm



July 3 Bishop mark

Only early marks **I**
instead of **J** for
January, June and
July.

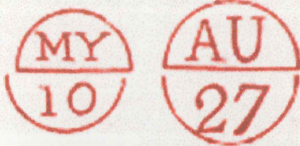
3 July, 1772, **IY/3** Edinburgh to Haddington

1d manuscript rate for one post stage, up to 50 miles. Scan of front overlaid on cover

III. Large Circular Bishop Mark

London to and via Edinburgh

Scottish Bishop marks grew progressively larger in the 1780s and into the 1790s. These markings were still comprised of two halves of equal diameter. In London, new types of Bishop marks were introduced, with first indications of the year included in the dating. Scotland did not add the year until 20 years later.



1770s 1780-90s
15 mm to 21 mm

Large Circular Bishop Mark

20mm
Closed segments



DE/20 on reverse,
20 mm

17 December, 1789, London to Alva, Scotland—showing scan of cover front

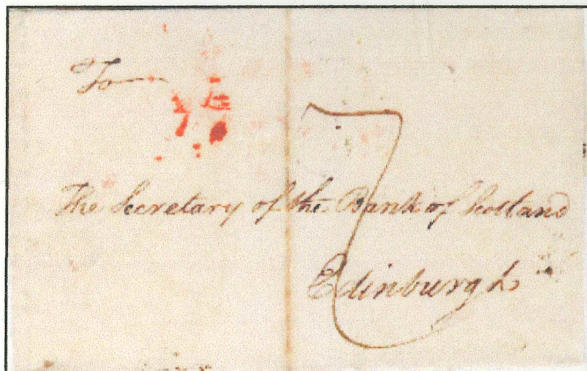
DE/17/89 London to DE/20 Edinburgh, docketed 22 December received Alva. 7d manuscript unpaid. Rate manuscript 5d London to Edinburgh, Edinburgh to Alva, 2d. Two strikes of the DE/20 Edinburgh owing to placement by fold.

Differentiating the Markings

On Scottish marks, months January, June and July all use the letter "J" JY/21 below rather than the English "T" as 17/IY below.

Large Circular Bishop Mark

21mm
Top and bottom segments open .4mm



Reduced scan cover front



17 July, 1786, 17/IY London to JY/21 Edinburgh, 2d inland unpaid.

III. Large Circular Bishop Mark

Mail to and From Edinburgh

As date accountability emphasis continued, when new marking were ordered they were progressively larger in size. Not ones to waste a functioning marking, the Edinburgh post office would still use the smaller markings they had. Covers from dates into the 1790s can have small markings, but most are larger in size.



1790s
to 21mm

Large Circular Bishop Mark

20mm

Closed upper and lower segments

Understanding the rate markings→

7d rate London to Bannockburn

2d inland Scotland (at top)

5d London to Edinburgh (right)



Large Circular Bishop Mark

20mm

Closed upper and lower segments



16 January, 1797, Ardwell to **JA/16** Edinburgh at St. Andrews Square
6d unpaid

11 April, 1793

London to Bannockburn

AP/8/93 London to **AP/11** Edinburgh

7d unpaid

←St Andrews Square,
Edinburgh, early center of
commerce

III. Large Circular Bishop Mark

Use within Scotland

Distinct serif letters on the large format Bishop marks **improved their legibility**, an increased effort to ensure the marks could be distinguished. The dating of mail was for the public, not just a back room function.

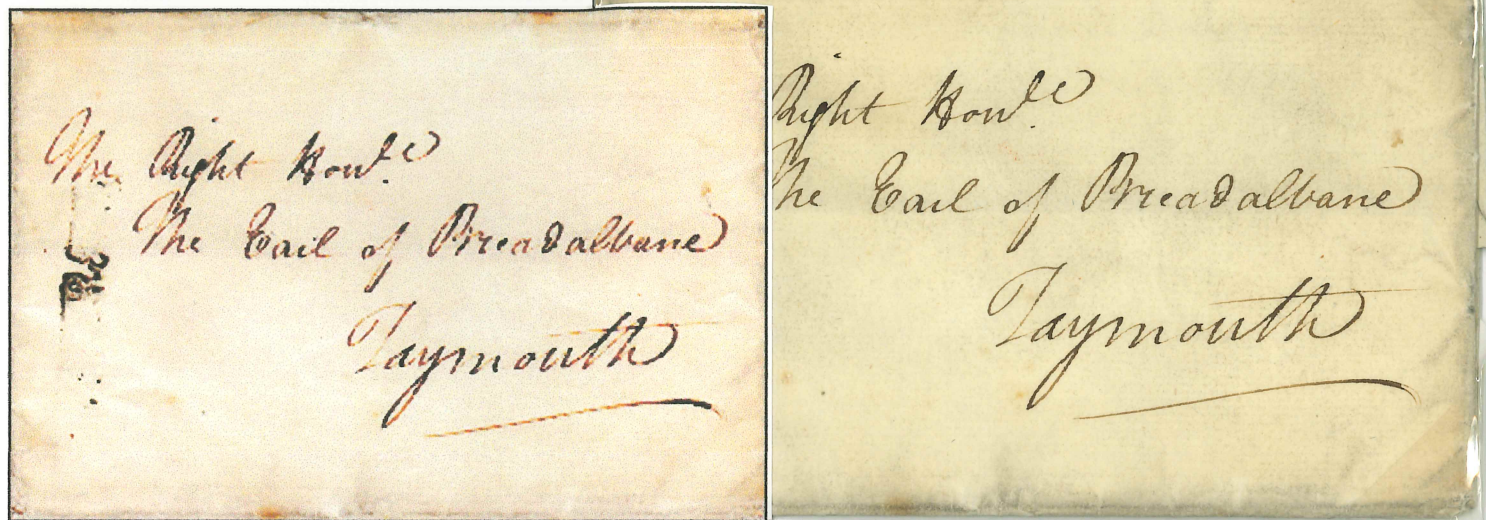
Large Circular Bishop Mark

20mm

Misaligned lower segment .2mm left

Free Mail: Addressed to:

The Right Honorable Earl of Breadalbane



22 July, 1790, Inveraray to Taymouth, Scottish Highlands

Sending **INVERARAY** handstamp, Bishop mark **JY/22** at Edinburgh as transit marking. Free mail.

Wax seal, "arma parata fero" translated from Latin, ready to bear arms.

Rates: Effective August, 1784 (per 24 George 3, c37) the base rate of one post stage increased to 2d, a rate of 3d for up to 50 miles, and 6d for over 150 miles.

Large Circular Bishop Mark

19mm

Closed upper and lower segments



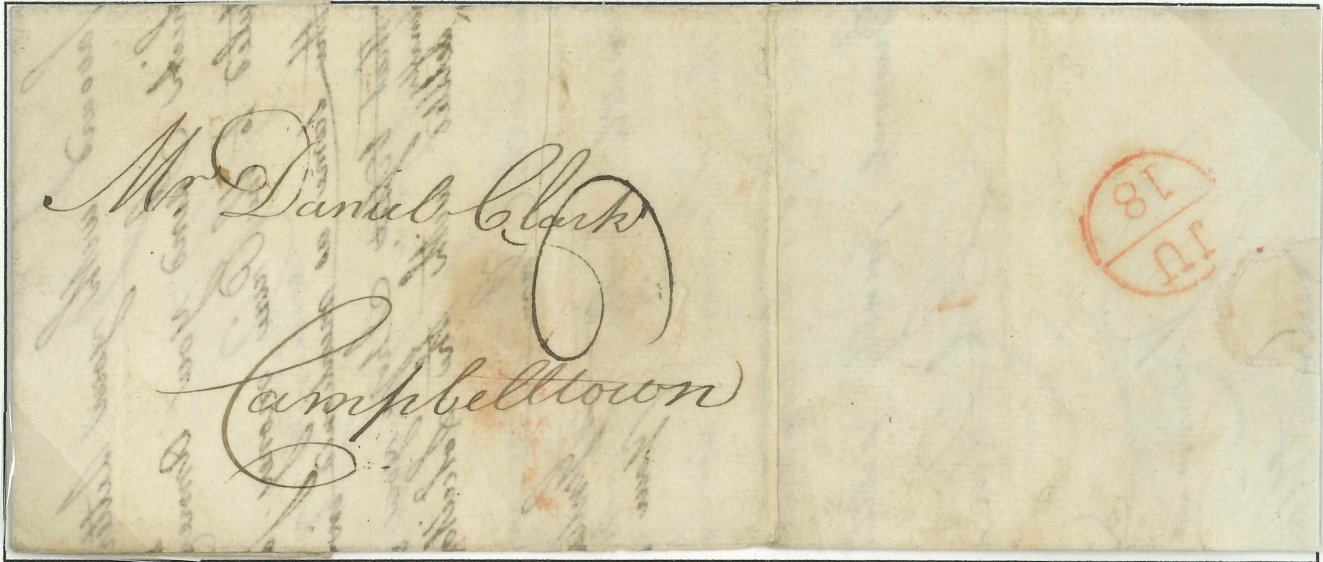
19 August, 1790, **AU/19** Edinburgh to Campbelltown. Double rate letter, 1/- indicated with manuscript 1/- mark. Double rate applied, letter with an invoice as enclosure. 6d letter rate for over 150 miles.

III. Large Circular Bishop Mark

Use within Scotland

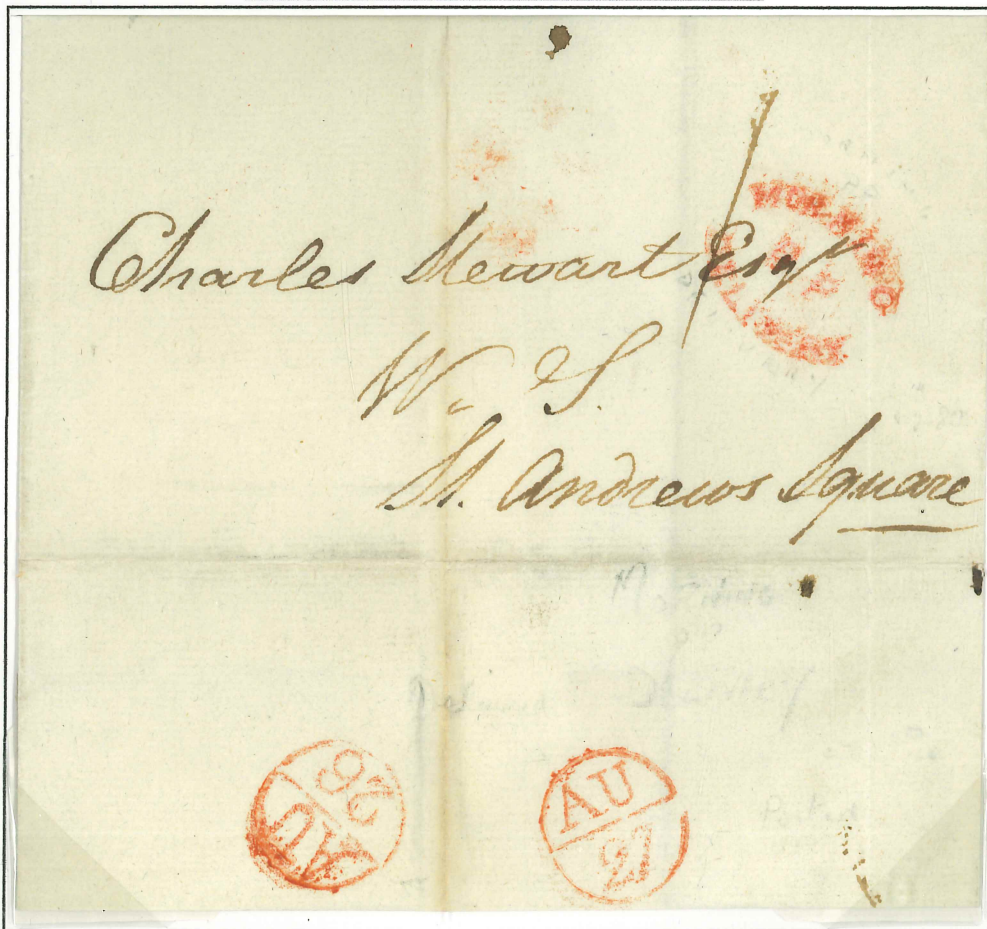
As the century wore on Edinburgh Bishop marks became progressively larger. Slight misalignment of the segments of the brass ring is still noticeable, as shown on the **AU/27** marking below.

Large Circular Bishop Mark
20mm
Closed upper and lower segments




Large Circular Bishop Mark
19mm
AU/26 closed **AU/27** lower open 4mm right

↑ 18 June, 1788
JU/18 Edinburgh to
Campbelltown
6d manuscript rate on front



26 August, 1796, Edinburgh local
to St Andrews Square. Oval
Morning Post Paid (PP) Delivery
applied in Edinburgh.

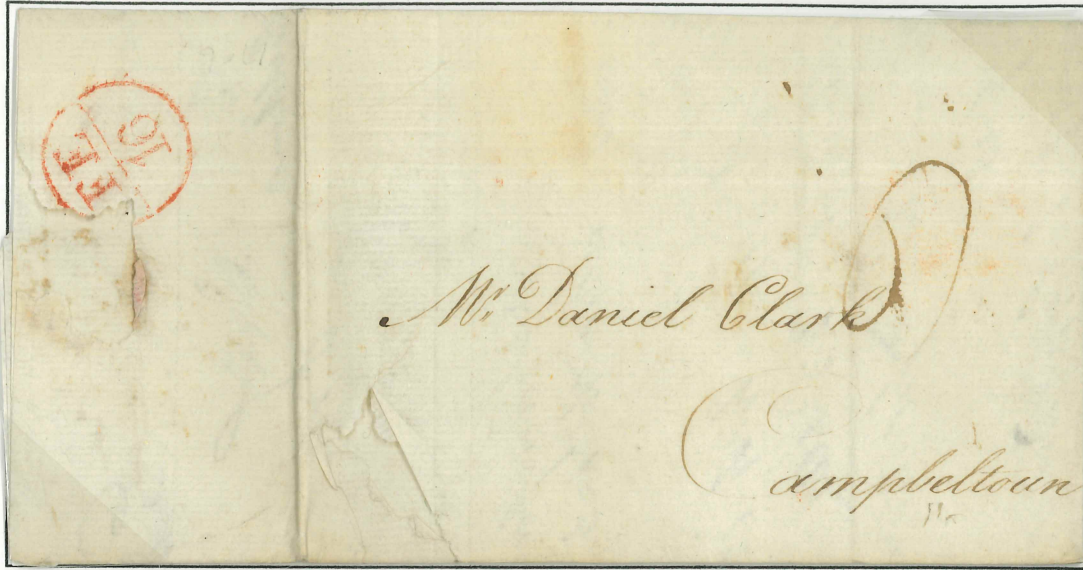
AU/26 and **AU/27** marked for
next day delivery, 1d local penny
post due.

 Measurements of the open
marking: 19mm wide, 20 mm tall.
AU/27 Bishop mark not closed

III. Large Circular Bishop Mark

Use to Scottish Towns

Around the turn of the century, the Scottish postmaster designed datestamping on the front of the letters. Meanwhile, the larger 20mm or more size had also become commonplace.



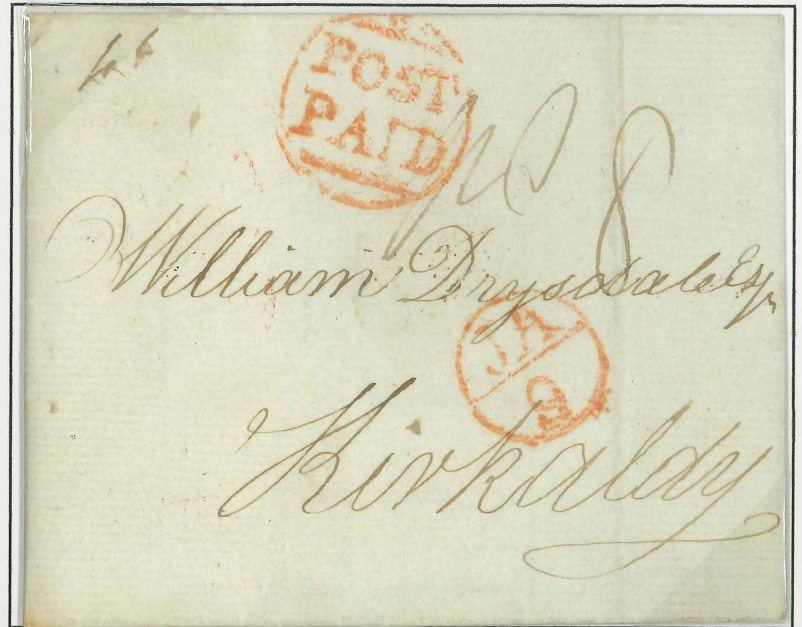
Large Circular Bishop Mark
20mm
Closed upper and lower segments

Edinburgh to
Campbelltown
16 February, 1796,
FE/16 Edinburgh to
Campbelltown
6d manuscript rate

Large Circular Bishop Mark
19mm
Closed upper and lower segments

Edinburgh to Kirkaldy
9 January, 1803 →
JA/9 Edinburgh to Kirkaldy
Marking applied to front of letter
8d paid, manuscript rate.

Circular **POST PAID** applied at
Edinburgh, handstamp used 1804-
1807 only.



Large Circular Bishop Mark
21mm
Lower segment open .2mm right

London to Edinburgh
4 February, 1800
FE/7 applied Edinburgh
8d unpaid



IV. Large Unbroken Circle

Inland Use

In use for only three years, this new design of the Bishop mark shows an improvement in the method of attaching the upper and lower halves, and the diameter line appears broken when imprinting the marking. What is significant is that the two portions now create an **unbroken circle**, providing a more uniform strike. At this time and with these new Bishop marks, strikes are uniformly found on the **front of the letter**.



1799-1801
20 - 21mm

Large Unbroken Circle
20mm
Closed upper and lower segments

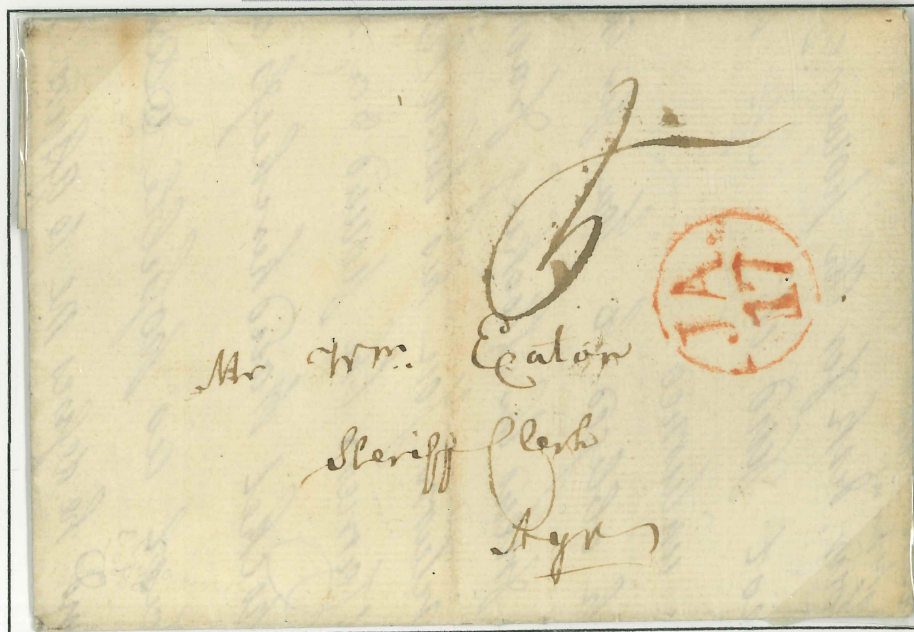
Bishop Mark Design Differences:

- ◆ Diameter is broken or not imprinting
- ◆ Two semi-circles form true circle
- ◆ No more misaligned segments found
- ◆ Stop after second letter denoting the month
- ◆ Larger font size for letters and numbers



4 December, 1799, **DE./4** Edinburgh to Huntly, 7d unpaid

Large Unbroken Circle
21mm
Closed upper and lower segments



17 January, 1800
JA./17 Edinburgh to Ayr,
Manuscript 5d unpaid

IV. Large Unbroken Circle

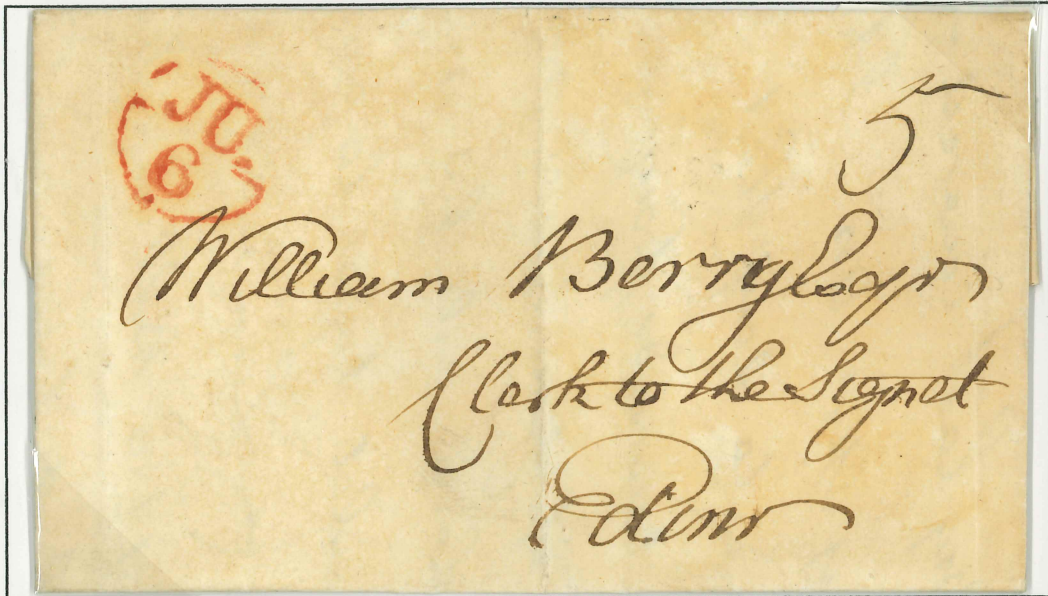
Inland Use as Receiving Mark

These distinctive Scottish Bishop marks provide an improved and more clear strike because:

- ◆ Enlarged font size of the letters and numbers
- ◆ Thicker serif letterset
- ◆ Overall size of the marking
- ◆ Application to the front of the letter

While all Bishop mark changes made markings larger and more readable, this marking fell out of use at the turn of the century in Scotland as more information was added to markings used.

Large Unbroken Circle
21mm
Closed upper and lower segments

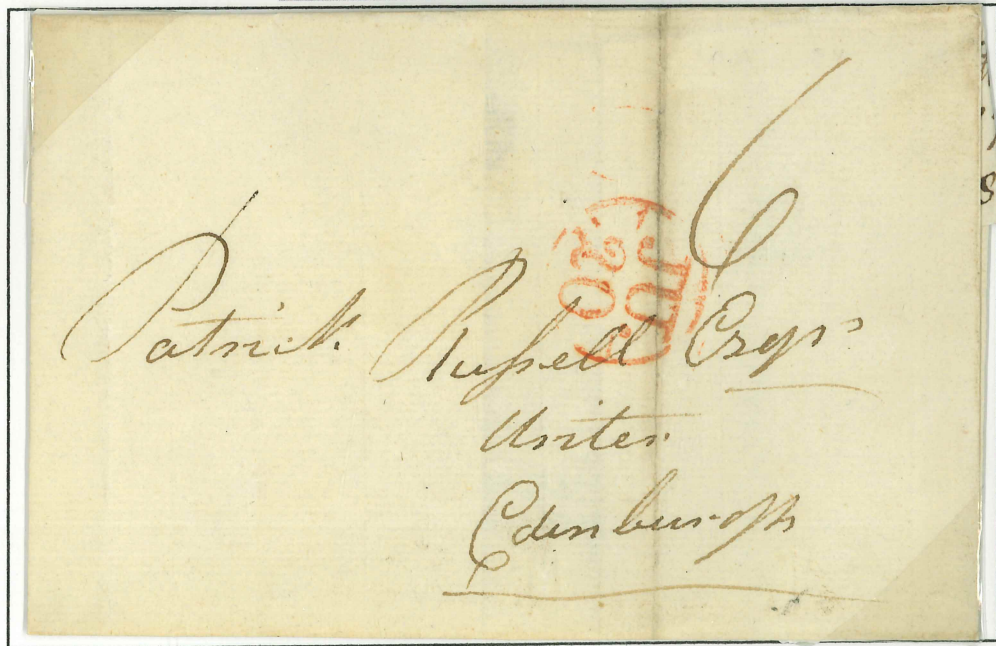


5 June, 1801
Cuper to Edinburgh
JU./6 received.
5d unpaid.

Rates: In April, 1801, postal rates increased again. New rates were measured in English miles and letter rates were per sheet. A 6d rate applied to 50 to 80 mile distance.

Large Unbroken Circle
21mm
Closed upper and lower segments

20 June, 1801
Paisley to Edinburgh
JU./20 marked upon
arrival in Edinburgh
6d unpaid



V. Replacement Marks

Inland Mail - Year Dated Bishop Marks

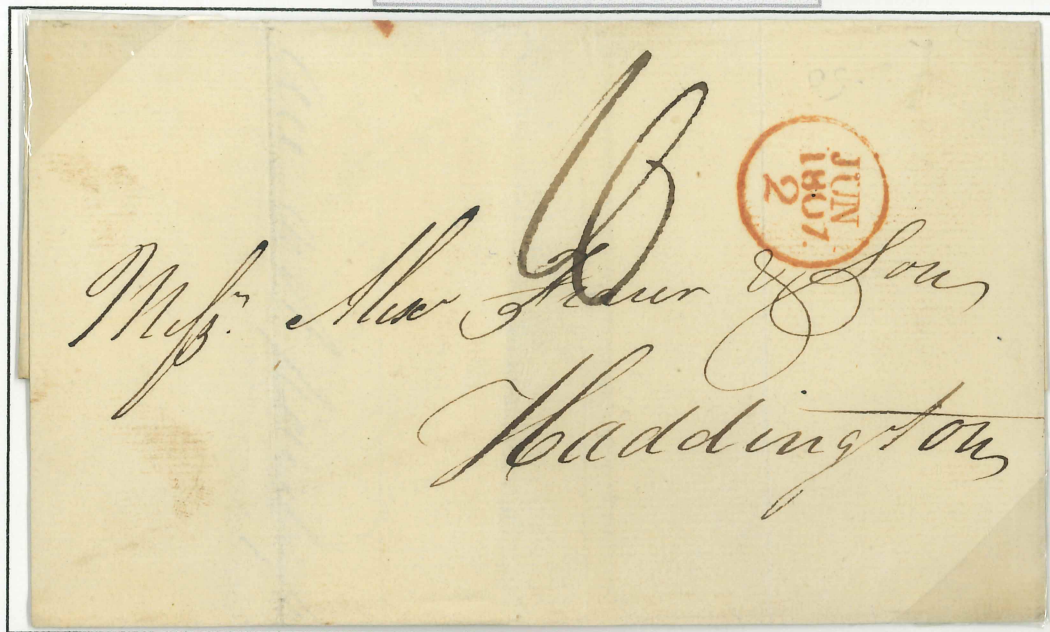
The "Dated Bishops" came into use at the turn of the century in Scotland. The practice of **adding the year** in the datestamp had been adopted earlier in England. Modified Bishop marks with the year in full across the center were introduced in 1801 in two sizes. New marking types brought an end to the early Bishop mark format.

Year Dated Bishop Mark

20mm



1801-1808
20 mm



2 June, 1807, **JUN/1807./2** Edinburgh to Haddington 10d rate.

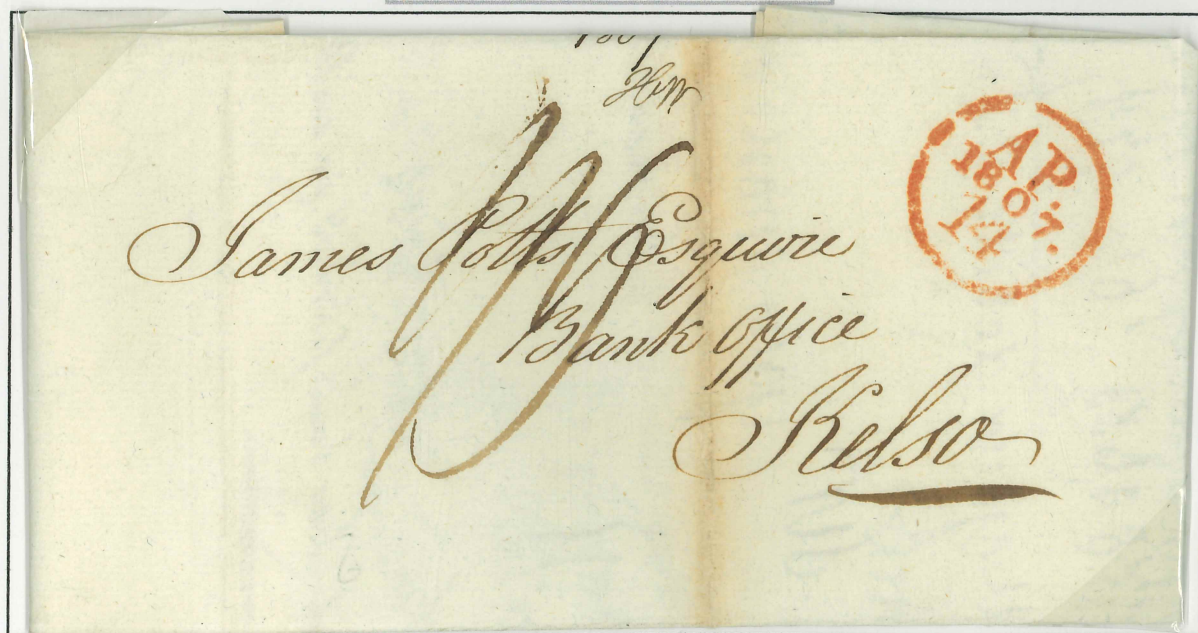
Rates: Following the 1801 rate increase, in 1805 a new increase to aid in Napoleonic war funding was imposed. For the Scots postal rates experience a 20% increase in a decade. Many letters cost up to or more than 1/- to mail.

Year Dated Bishop Mark

25mm



1802 - 1812
25 mm



14 April, 1807 **AP./1807./14** Edinburgh to Kelso 1/8d double rate letter with enclosure.

VI. Epilogue

Bishop Mark—Paid & Year Inserted

The Bishop mark was made obsolete in 1806, its use significantly tapering off at the turn of the century. Not wanting to let the old markings go to waste, in 1807 the first dated paid stamp appeared, clearly modeled from the earlier Bishop mark. A theory advanced that the top and bottom segments of the actual Bishop mark were used with a Paid & Date band to make the new marking. The theory is correct, the marks were reused.

A Thrifty and Creative Reuse of the Discontinued Bishop Mark.

Bishop Mark—Paid & Year Inserted

Center under sized, 2mm too small

How it Worked:

Bishop Mark Top →

Inserted Band →

Paid & Year

Date

Bishop Bottom

Date →



1807 - 1812

20mm x 28mm

Study of seven proving copies

provides evidence of mid segment inserted into existing marks.

20 July, 1809, Banff to Edinburgh
3/-4d paid, 4x rate of 10d for over
170 miles.

Paidstamp **JY/PAID/1809./22**
applied in Edinburgh.



Bishop Mark—Paid & Year Inserted

Center aligned, lower misaligned & open

Required →
regiment
indication

Soldier's Letter

Berwick via Edinburgh
to Aberdeen



← Berwick
Mileage Mark
1810-1812

340 miles to
London.

Required →
Counter signature by
commanding officer

22 August, 1810, Berwick to Aberdeen—Paidstamp **AU/PAID/1810./22** applied in Edinburgh.
Soldier's letter was signed by commanding officer and sent at privilege 1d rate.