

SOUTH AFRICAN MARITIME POSTAL HISTORY 19th Century Shipping Mail

Tony Howgrave-Graham



1875. Double rate combination cover from OFS via Cape Colony to England.
Cancelled '1' Bloemfontein with OFS 2 x 6d (pair) paying the rate to the Cape border.
Cancelled '1' Cape Town with Cape 2 x 4d (pair) paying transit across the Cape, plus
2 x 1/- (pair) for packet rate of 1/10d. (This rate is scarce - lasted only a couple of years).

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19th CENTURY MARITIME POSTAL HISTORY

INTRODUCTION

At the start of the 19th century sending mail to GB relied on the correspondent finding a ship willing to take it. Usually this was on an East Indiaman or Naval ship. Pages 1&2 show examples of these. The first steamship to visit the Cape on the way to Calcutta was the *Enterprise* leaving Gravesend on 3 Aug 1825, reaching Cape Town on 13th October and Calcutta on 7th December failing by 50% to reach its target time. Loaded with coal the 20 passengers got cramped conditions and got covered with coal dust whilst the crew got exhausted shovelling it! Improvements in steamships took place but it was another 12 years before, at the end of 1850, the General Screw Steam Shipping Company landed its first £30,000 contract to provide a regular mail service. This caused great excitement in the Cape. The *Bosphorus* was the first to reach Cape Town on 21 Jan 1851. Pages 3,4&5 show trips by the *Hellespont*, *Sir John Peel* and *Bosphorus*. In 1852 the contract was reworked to make the ships continue eastward to India and back via the Cape. Pages 6&7 show the inaugural trip by the *Queen of the South*. She was welcomed in Cape Town but lauded in Mauritius where a day's holiday was proclaimed and there was a "grand banquet" in the evening. This extension, however, badly affected the timeliness and efficiency of the service. The Australian Royal Mail Steam Navigation Company (page 8) managed to get a few contracted mail runs but were even more unreliable than General Screw. The Colony's first constitution was carried on the General Screw's *Lady Jocelyn* (page 9) arriving in April 1853 but this was one of the last of their sailings as they slid into liquidation. The Crimea intervened with many ships being requisitioned and there followed a two year period of no contract. Pages 10&11 show just how long things could then take (2&3 months). The Lindsay Line then obtained the mail contract. Their first attempt with RMS *England* (page 12) leaving 6 Aug 1856 took 54 days (16 more than contract). In fact their second sailing (RMS *Tynemouth*) arrived before it! (page 13). They were so inconsistent that people often used ship letters (page 14) rather than the packet services. As they slid towards oblivion the Union Line appeared and secured the mail contract (pages 15-21) With diamonds being found in South Africa in 1867 and then gold in 1886, running a shipping line there became a much more attractive proposition. The first competition to the Union Line came from the Diamond Line in 1864 (pages 22&23, the first being a cover from Thomas Baines, of considerable artistic fame, to his mother). It was much heralded by the Eastern Cape & Natal as ships went beyond the Cape to Algoa Bay and Durban. However their service was so erratic that they fizzled out and went into liquidation in 1867. Their contract had been based on the 4d ship letter rate rather than the 1/- of the packet rate and their brief existence did have the benefit of forcing the Union Line to extend their services eastwards.

In 1867 the Cape & Natal Steam Navigation Co (page30) tried to muscle in but the chartering of ships wasn't an economic way to run things and they didn't last long. The 1868-72 contract with the Union line stipulated a packet rate of 1/- whilst the ship letter rate was 4d. This was a bit of a nonsense and in the early 1870's a certain Donald Currie took advantage and entered the fray from 1872 with newer ships so that you could either pay 1/-,

take longer and, if you were a passenger, endure more discomfort, or 4d, for faster mail and a more comfortable passage if you were aboard. The new contract for 1872 was delayed by prolonged argument and didn't occur until 1876. Page 37 has an interesting letter to Currie from the Castle Line offices in Fenchurch St. with 2d late fee to catch the 8.20 GWR train from Paddington to reach his agent in Dartmouth next day for forwarding on the *Windsor Castle* to Currie who was in Cape Town. The new 1876 contract travelled on the same sailing with the news that the packet rate was reduced to 6d and the Union and Castle Lines would share the postal contract with each sailing every other week. The two lines then entered into an expensive competition trying to outdo the other with some very fast times achieved. The display ends with the *Scot's* maiden voyage in 1893 with the first of the Ocean Post Offices aboard. This voyage set a record of 14 days 18 hours 57 minutes for the trip. A time that wasn't beaten for nearly 50 years.

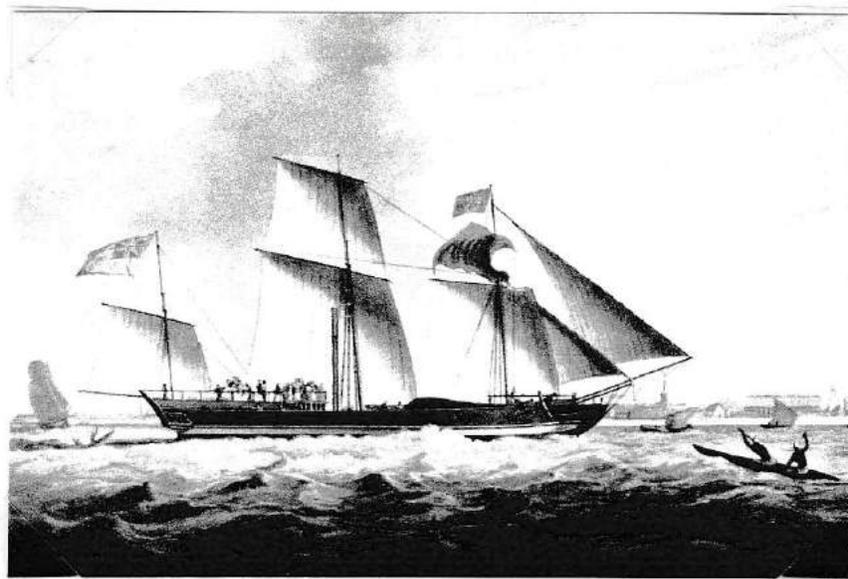
The ocean post offices, which continued right up to the onset of WW1 are a separate display with, of course, the merger of the two companies to form the Union Castle Line in 1900.

I hope you enjoy this display and that it may encourage some of you to start collecting these attractive covers which are historically, socially and philatelically full of interest.

References: *Ships and South Africa* : Marischal Murray : OUP 1933

Union Castle Chronicle 1853-1953 : Murray : Longmans 1953

The Atlantic Sea-Posts to the Cape of Good Hope to 1883 : John Dickson 2017

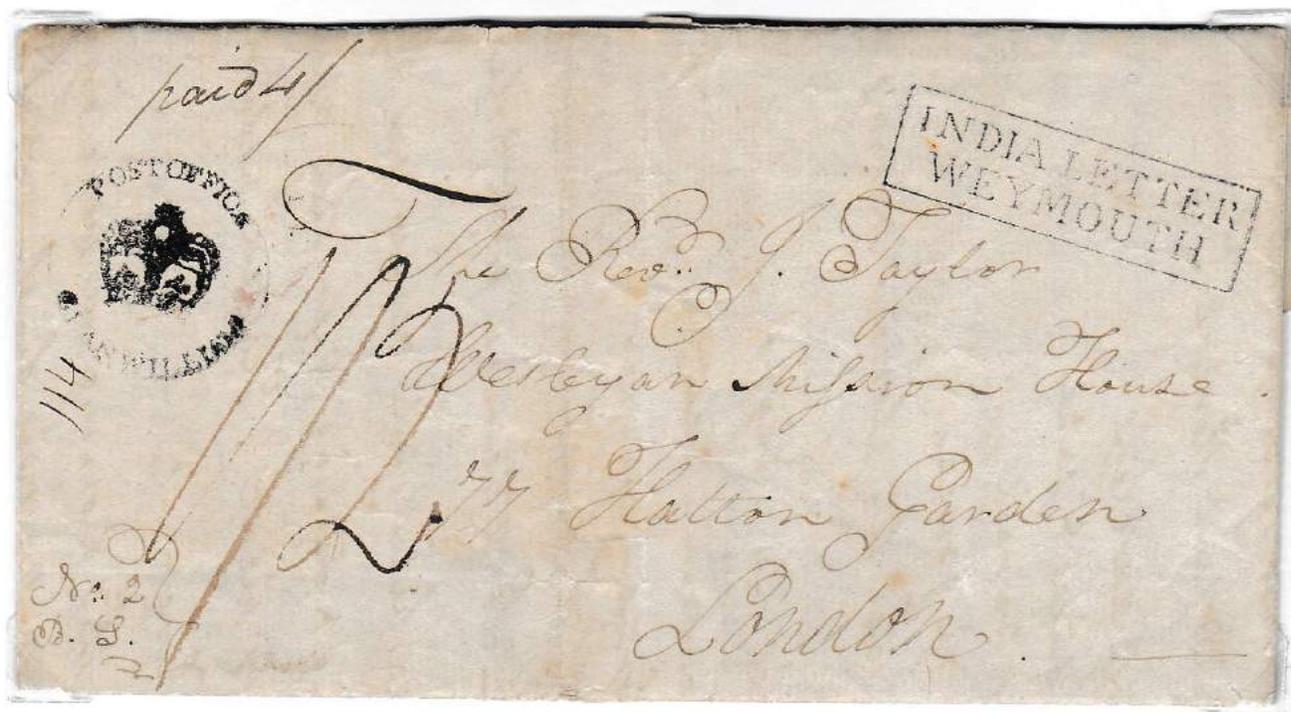


THE FIRST STEAMSHIP SEEN IN SOUTH AFRICAN WATERS
THE ENTERPRISE, 1825

INDIA SHIP MAIL FROM THE CAPE

WEYMOUTH

4 Nov 1823 to the Wesleyan Mission House, London, describing the anniversary of the "Heathen School"
& a trip over the Salt River, posted at ClanWilliam, "paid 4d" to Cape Town, "1/2" ship charge with
larger boxed "INDIA SHIP LETTER / WEYMOUTH", 10 Feb London receipt.



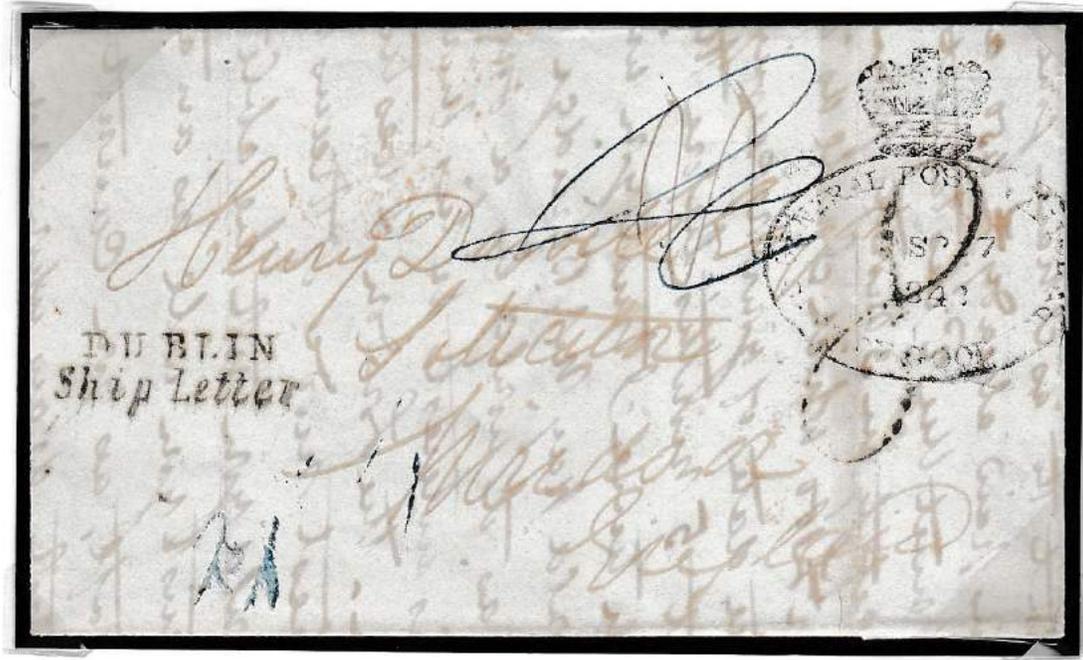
15 Jan 1826 from Grahamstown (crowned PO) via Cape Town (28 Feb PO oval) to London
2/- ship letter charge. Smaller Weymouth India letter. 15 May London receipt



INDIA SHIP MAIL FROM THE CAPE

DUBLIN

27 Sep 1842 from Cape Town (Crowned GPO mark) to Windsor, unusually via Ireland
"4" ms charge mark applied at Cape Town, "DUBLIN / Ship Letter" and scarce handstruck "8"



Backstamped : Dublin receipt diamond in red 17 Dec, London transit in orange 19 Dec
and Windsor receipt n black same day. (also a kissprint of the Cape GPO mark)



THE GENERAL SCREW STEAM SHIPPING COMPANY

On 11 November 1850 the Admiralty Commissioners awarded the first mail contract between the UK and Cape to James Laming, MD of the above company. The contract stipulated monthly sailings in both directions with a 35 day passage time and was worth £30,750. The company had 4 ships. The small *Sir John Peel* (233 tons) which was a paddle steamer and *Bosphorus*, *Propontis*, and *Hellespont* which were all 500 ton screw vessels 175' long. The *Bosphorus* left 3 days late on 18 Dec 1850 arriving in Cape Town 27 January, which, although 5 days over contract, was a short lived record for the trip and included stops at Madeira, St Vincent, Sierra Leone & St Helena.

2 April 1851 EL from Cape Town to Edinburgh carried on the *Hellespont*, charged 2/- (double rate) and 4d local Cape charge. Cape Town GPO crown in oval handstamp



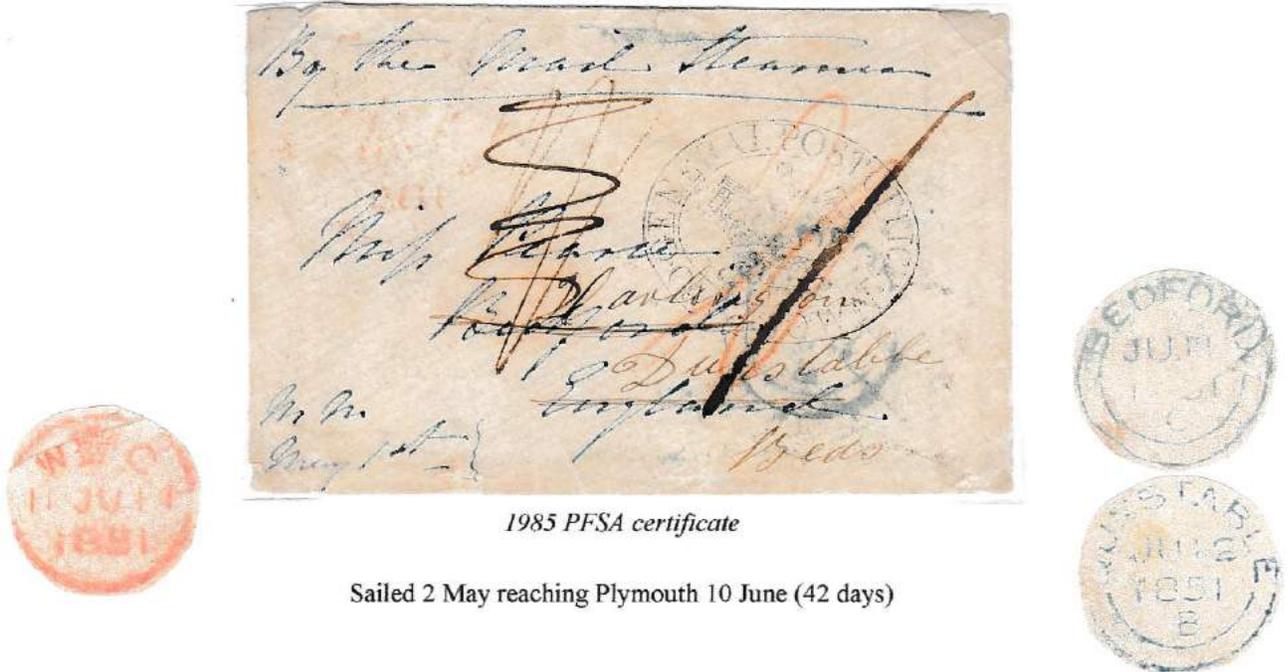
Edinburgh receipt 10 May 1851



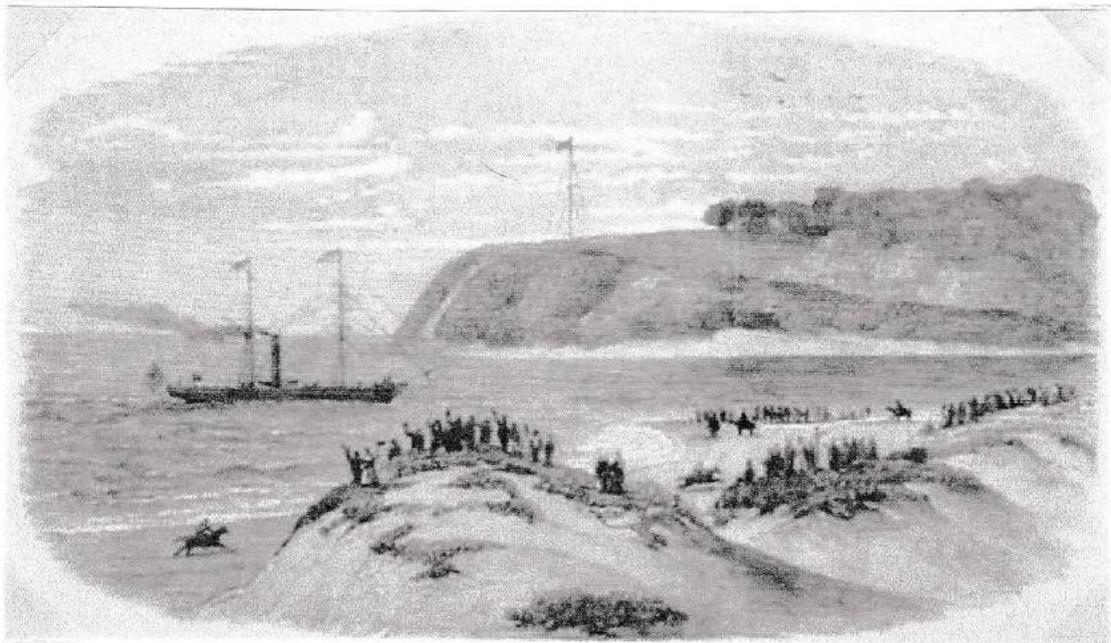
RMS *Hellespont*

THE GENERAL SCREW STEAM SHIPPING COMPANY

1 May 1851 envelope from Cape Town to Bedford (forwarded to Dunstable) carried on the *Sir John Peel*.
4d local Cape charge, 1/- packet rate (obliterated) and "1" forwarding charge



The contract did not include mail to Natal. Such mail took 3 weeks either overland or by sea to reach Cape Town. In Aug. 1852 a supplementary contract provided for this and the smaller *Sir John Peel* was transferred from the main fleet to provide this service.



15 Aug 1852 (3 days after arrival) she became the first steamer to cross the bar at Point Natal and a half day holiday was proclaimed so that people could watch. The manoeuvre was successful

THE GENERAL SCREW STEAM SHIPPING COMPANY

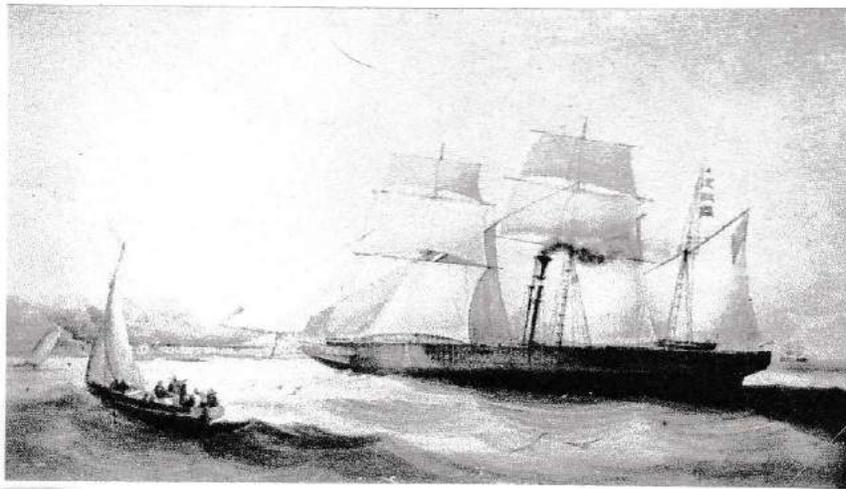
29 May 1852 double rate missionary cover to London. 4d local charge and 2/- packet rate
Cape Town GPO crown in oval. London receipt 7 July



To the

General Secretaries of the
Wesleyan Missionary Society
Centenary Hall and Mission House
Bishopsgate-Street-within
London.

per Steam packet
29th May 1852.
" "

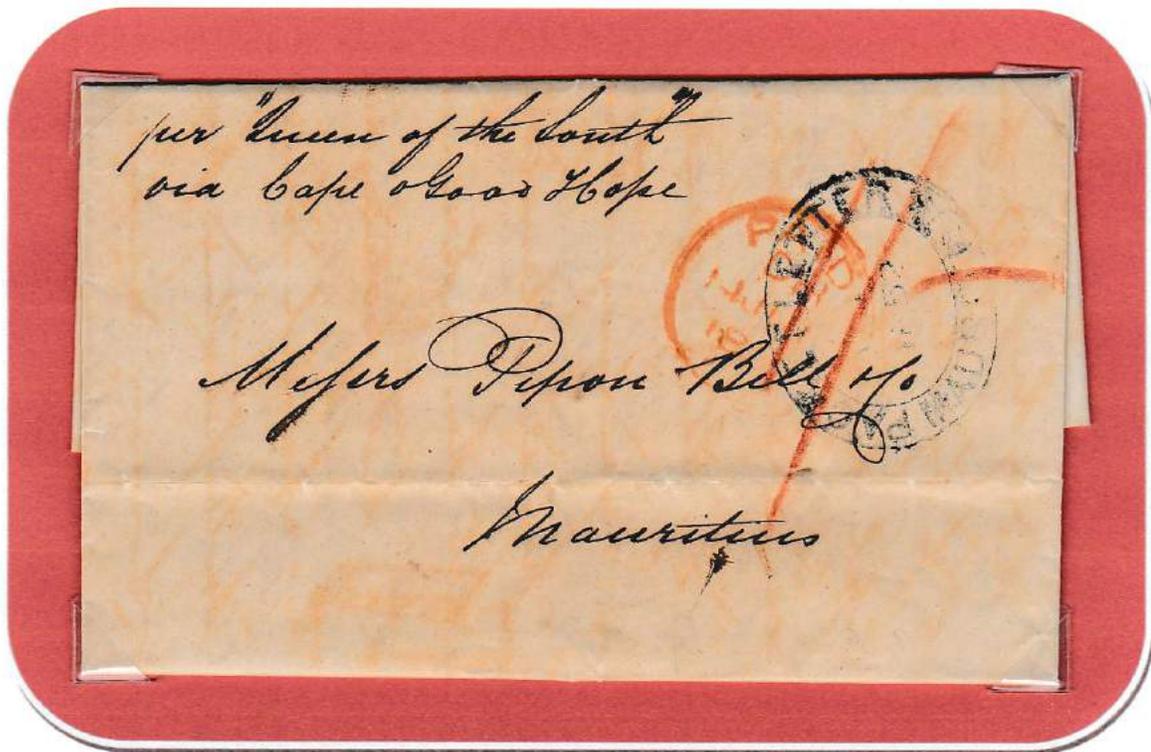


RMS Bosphorus

THE GENERAL SCREW STEAM SHIPPING COMPANY

MAIDEN VOYAGE OF THE "*QUEEN of the SOUTH*"

14 June 1852 EL from London to Pipon Bell in Mauritius. "1/-" in manuscript with London paid ring for 14 June. The ship left Plymouth on 15th but had to return because of bad weather. finally left 21 June arriving in Cape Town 29 July



Arrived in Mauritius on 13 August where it picked up the oval "PACKET LETTER / MAURITIUS"

The Mauritians were so pleased to see the ship, it representing their first opportunity of receiving a regular service, that they declared a day's holiday & had a "grand banquet"

AUSTRALIAN ROYAL MAIL STEAM NAVIGATION CO.

The ARMSNCo made a few runs carrying mail from the Cape but was so hopelessly inconsistent that it wasn't awarded a permanent contract.

4 Nov 1853 EL from Cape Town to London carried on SS *Victoria*. Charged 1/4 with the 4d Cape charge paid by one of the earliest known usages of 4d on blued paper on an overseas cover.



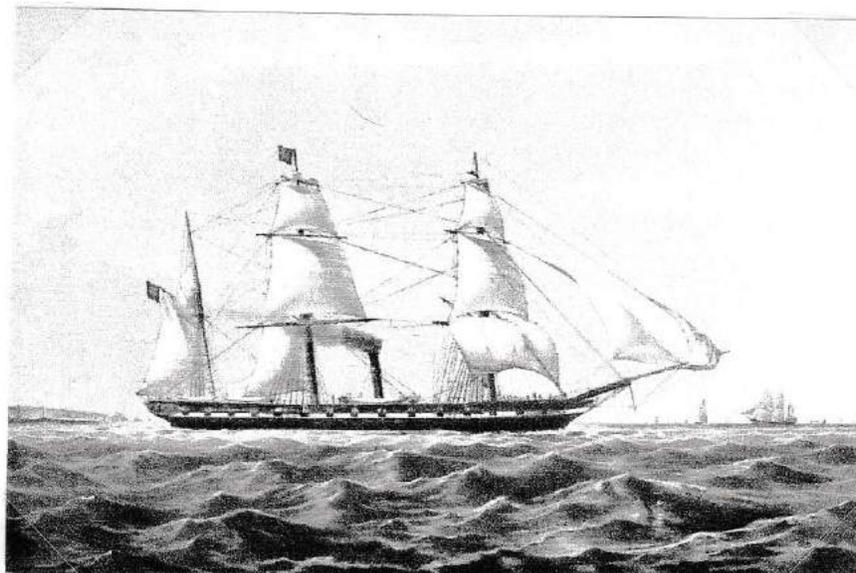
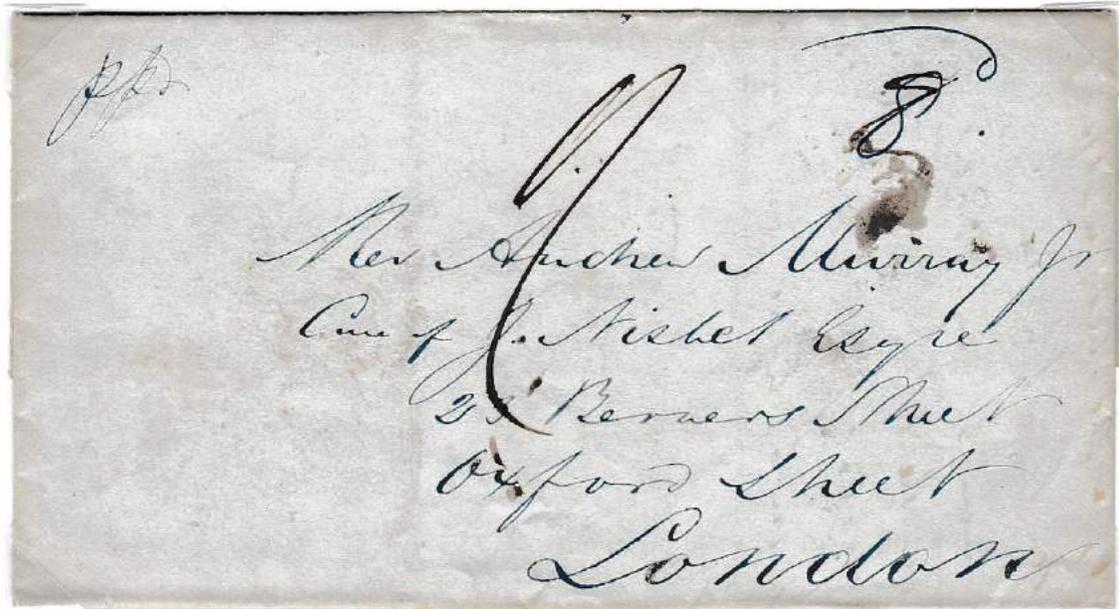
"*Victoria*" left London 19 June 1853 for Australia and reached Cape Town on its return trip on 4 November reaching London in good time on 10 December.

"*Victoria*" was a Brunel iron ship along with the "*Adelaide*" built by John Scott Russell at Gravesend. These are much less well known than the *Great Britain*, *Great Western* and *Great Eastern*. "*Victoria*" was 261' on the waterline, registered at 1350 tons and fitted with 4 masts. Ironically in view of the Company's later problems she claimed £500 on her first run to Australia making it in record time. She used 37 tons of coal a day.

THE GENERAL SCREW STEAM SHIPPING COMPANY

The Crimean War (late 1853 to early 1856) disrupted the sea mails to south Africa significantly.
More and more ships were requisitioned for military purposes.

16 Mar 1854 entire from Cape Town to London carried by the *Lady Jocelyn*.
Local Cape charge of 8d. Packet charge 1/-. London receipt 9 May



The *Lady Jocelyn* has a place in history as she carried the Cape Colony's first constitution in its final form which arrived at Cape Town in April 1853

THE "NO CONTRACT" PERIOD

12 Dec 1854 Soldier's letter from Pte Joseph Turner, 6th Reg^t, signed by commanding officer, from Grahamstown to Coventry. Red ms "1" paying the soldier's concessionary rate, reached Cape Town 16 Dec, London 3 Mar 1855 ("2" applied, ?why) & Coventry same day.



reverse at full size



HMS *Merapi* left Cape Town with mail 16 Jan 1855 when bound for Holland

The Eighth Frontier War

The Frontier (or Xhosa) wars recurred regularly between 1779 & 1879 on the Cape's eastern borders. The HQ for troops was at Grahamstown. The 8th was the bloodiest as the Xhosa had rifles for the first time. Sir Harry Smith ordered Xhosa squatters out of the Kat River region in June 1849. Malanjeni, a Xhosa prophet, had foretold that the Xhosa would not be affected by settlers' bullets. A British detachment of 650 men under Col Mackinnon was ambushed and retreated to Fort White Dec 1849 and the Xhosa attended settlers Christmas festivities only to turn on and kill them. Smith had alienated much Boer support after annexing the OFS so reinforcements were required. In 1852 Smith was recalled and replaced by George Cathcart. British Kaffaria was incorporated into the Cape in 1866.

NO MAIL CONTRACT

24 Nov 1854 envelope from Exeter to Cape Town (part of the Maclear correspondence)

franked strip of 4 2d blues (plate 4, perf.16) and sent as a ship letter

Cape Town arrival 19 March 1855 (117 days later!)

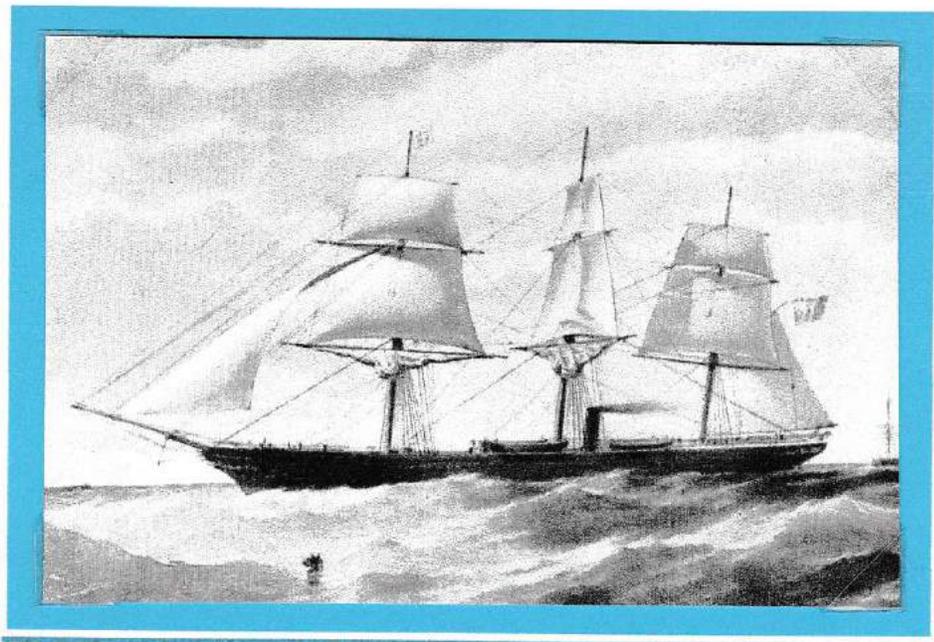
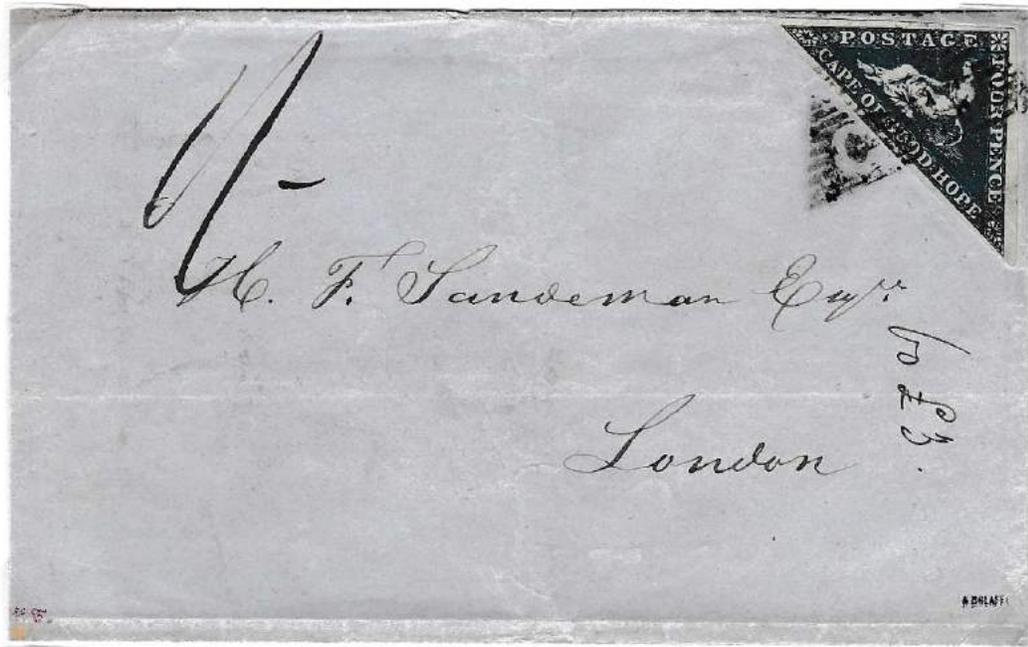


The *John Knox* left The Downs 27 days after posting on 20 Dec 1854 and took a further 90 days to reach Cape Town!

THE LINDSAY LINE

The first Lindsay Line ship, RMS *England*, left Dartmouth 6 Aug 1856 and took 54 days to reach Cape Town (contract time was 38 days) having run out of coal and travelled for the last fortnight under sail alone arriving 29 September. She then went on to Mauritius & Calcutta and did not return to Cape Town until 31 Jan 1857. In fact the second ship RMS *Tynemouth* arrived before it on 3 January and that had taken 55 days! The first trip from Cape Town to Dartmouth was RMS *England* on 27 January, arriving on 17 March.

January 1857 wrapper franked 4d deep blue on white paper carried on RMS *England's* first trip back to Dartmouth. Charged the 1/- packet rate in ms at Dartmouth (payable by the receiver)



RMS *England*

Due to its unreliability the Lindsay Line went into receivership at the end of 1857

THE LINDSAY LINE

The second Lindsay Line sailing was by RMS *Tynemouth* which left Dartmouth 6 Sep 1856 arriving in Cape Town on 31 October having taken 55 days. Having gone on to Calcutta she didn't get back to Cape Town until March '57 when she left on 13th and took 56 days to get back to Falmouth rather than Dartford, arriving on 8 May.

3 Sep 1856 EL from Brighton ("132" sideways duplex) to Cape Town franked cut to shape 1/- embossed with London transit (same day) and Cape Town receipt 31 October



1857 SHIP LETTER DURING LINDSAY LINE CONTRACT PERIOD

18 May 1857 double rate mourning cover from Port Elizabeth to Dublin franked
2x4d deep blue on white paper.

Reached Cape Town 21 May. The Lindsay Line RMS *Scotland* had sailed on 29 April arriving at Dartmouth 20 June. Uncertainty regarding the next Lindsay Line ship (in fact RMS *Ireland* on 24 June) meant this was sent as a ship letter (2x8d charge / ms "1/4"). This still took 11 weeks to arrive at Dublin (receipt 7 Aug) but was still quicker than waiting for the *Ireland* which arrived at Dartmouth 13 August.



Port Elizabeth 19 May 1857 Cape Town 21 May / London 6 Aug. Cape Town 21 May / Dublin 7 Aug.

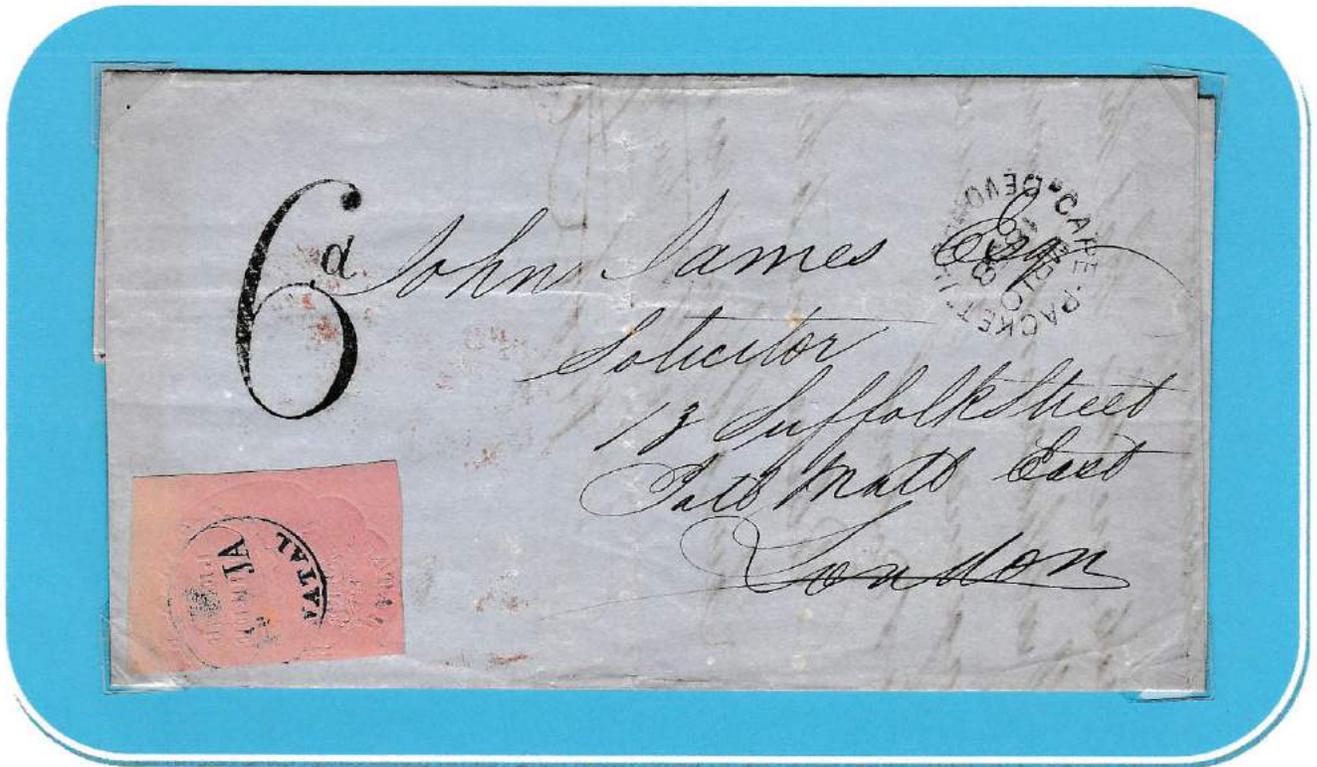
Sir Richard Orpen's brother joined his son's in South Africa in 1848. They farmed and surveyed and one doubled up as an Anglican vicar. Joseph Millard Orpen, who had joined his farming brothers in 1846 went on to become the youngest, and a very active, member of the first Volksraad in the OFS

The Colonial packet rate was uniformly reduced to 6d on 1 June 1857

EARLY UNION LINE MAIL

FROM NATAL

14 Jan 1858 letter sheet franked 3d rose to London with the ship letter charge a handstruck "6d"
Picked up by the *Waldesian* at Durban and reached Cape Town 23 January where it waited until
29th when RMS *Norman* left with mail for England



Cape Packet / Devonport arrival 10 March, London 11th.

The *Waldesian* was one of the coastal steamers run by Rennie.
It was wrecked in 1862

RMS *Norman* (1) was one of the original Union Line vessels which started the Cape mail run after being freed from duties during the Crimean War. It was a small, 530 ton ship. When the Union Line obtained two larger vessels in 1862 it was transferred to the South African coastal service in 1863 but returned to England in 1864 where it was sold on.

EARLY UNION LINE MAIL

Headed 12 May 1858 EL from Montpellier to Cape Town forwarded to Burghersdorp,
franked imperf 80c Napoleon with petits chiffres "2128", carried by RMS Athens



Montpellier 13 May, boxed "PP" in red, London transit 15 May and "1" accountability for UK

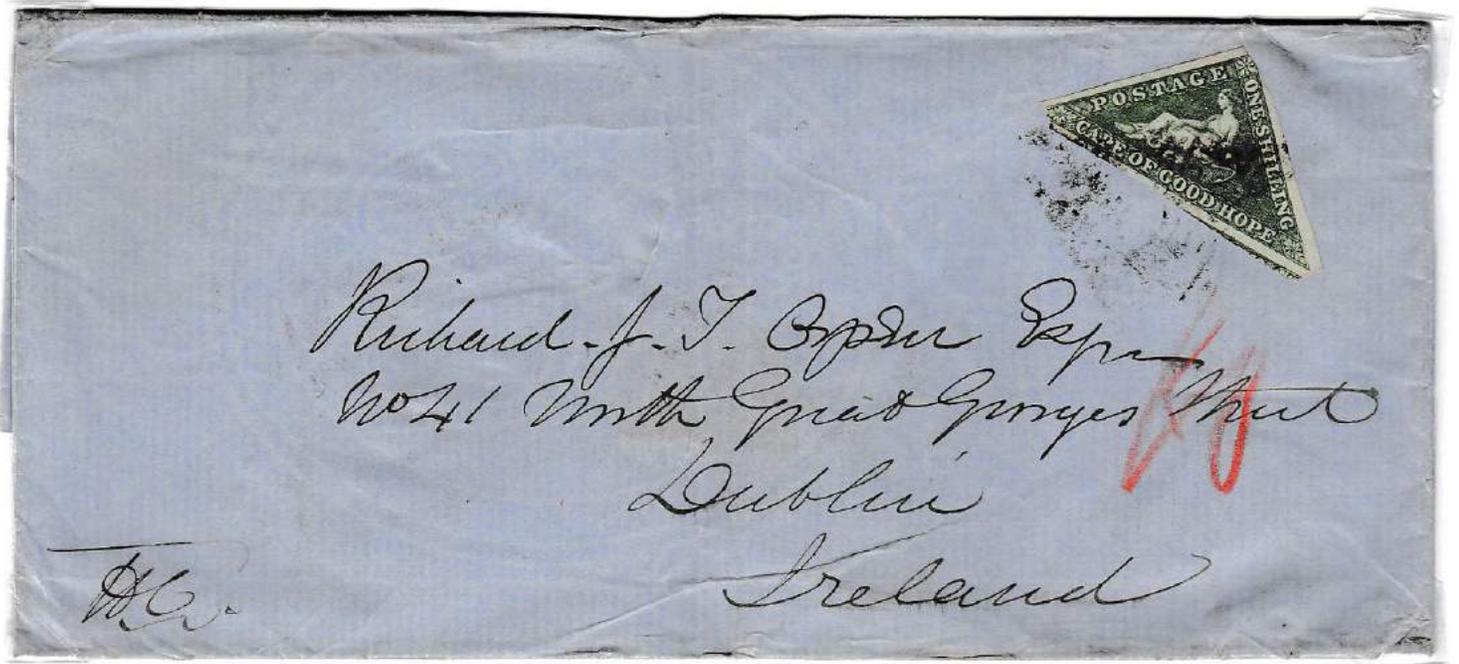


French TPOs, Devonport 16 May 1858, Cape Town 14 & 16 July 1858

The letter arrived at Devonport too late to catch *Phoebe* so had to wait until 6 June for *Athens*

EARLY UNION LINE MAIL

14 May 1859 double rate wrapper from the Orpen correspondence from Port Elizabeth to Dublin franked 1/- bright yellow green (2x6d)



Port Elizabeth 14 May 1859. Cape Town 18 May. Dublin 27 June.

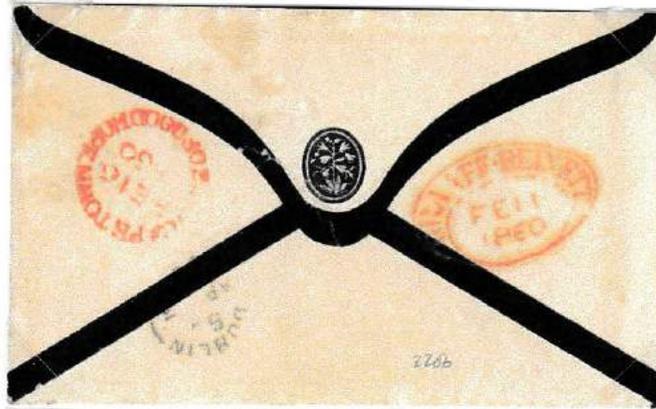


THE DEVONPORT CAPE PACKET

11 Feb 1860 mourning envelope from Graaff-Reinet to Dublin franked 6d pale rose-lilac
Carried on the *Norman*



reverse @ 70%



Graaff-Reinet 11 Feb, Cape Town 16 Feb, Devonport 1 Apr., Dublin 3 April

The Cape and Natal News reported that the *Norman*, which left Cape Town 21 Feb had arrived at Devonport on Sunday 1 April carrying the mail, 15 passengers and £12,000 worth of cargo.

The cargo included 289 bales of wool, 200 casks of wine, £2,000 worth of ostrich feathers and £4,000 worth of French coins

Built in 1854 on 13 Mar 1863 the *Norman* extended its trip to Algoa Bay and Port Natal.

This inaugurated the "Intercolonial Service" much to the delight of Natalers.

The ship didn't dare cross the bars on the Buffalo River or at Point Natal (Durban)

THE DEVONPORT CAPE PACKET

20 Nov 1861 from Cape Town to Manchester "Per Str Norman". franked 6d pale rose-lilac.
Cape Town unframed cds in red 21 Nov. Paid / Devenport / Cape Packet cds for 1 Jan '62
and unusual Manchester double ring receipt for 2 January.



RMS *Norman* was sister ship to the *Dane*. Both were small and identical being built by Charles Lunglely & Co of Deptford Green in 1854. Both were used by the Union Steamship Company on the Cape run.

THE DEVONPORT CAPE PACKET

6 Jan 1861 parcel piece Pietermaritzburg ("1" + crowned cds) to Deptford.
Cape Packet Devonport fo 3 March 1861



franked 3 pairs 1859 3d blue perf 14 without wmk

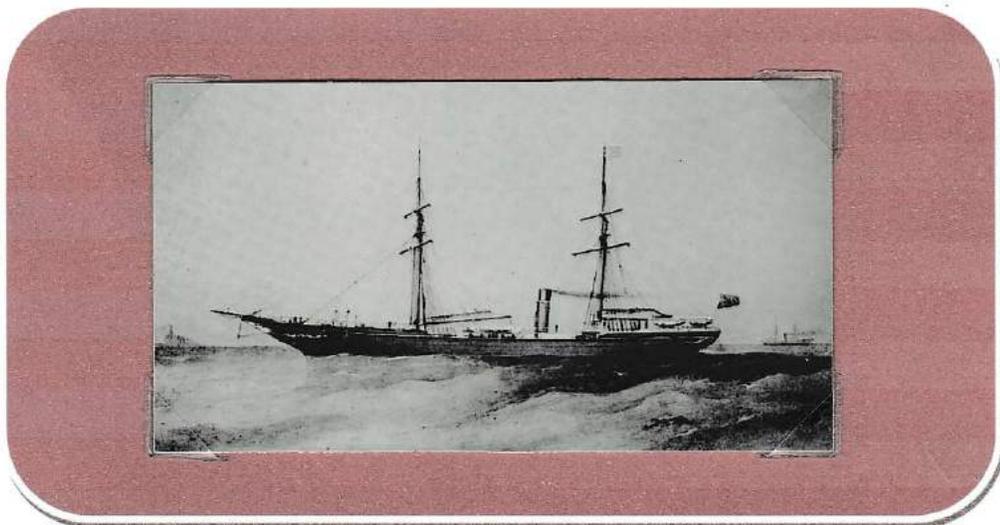
The *Albatross* left Natal 8 Jan 1861 arriving at Cape Town 14 Jan.
RMS *Norman* left Cape Town 21 Jan arriving Devonport 3 Mar 1861

THE DEVONPORT CAPE PACKET

20 Dec 1862 envelope from Cape Town to Elgin endorsed 'Per "Cambrian"', franked 6d deep rose-lilac, Cape Town cds in red. Devonport Packet 24 Jan 1863, Elgin receipt 26 January.



RMS Cambrian

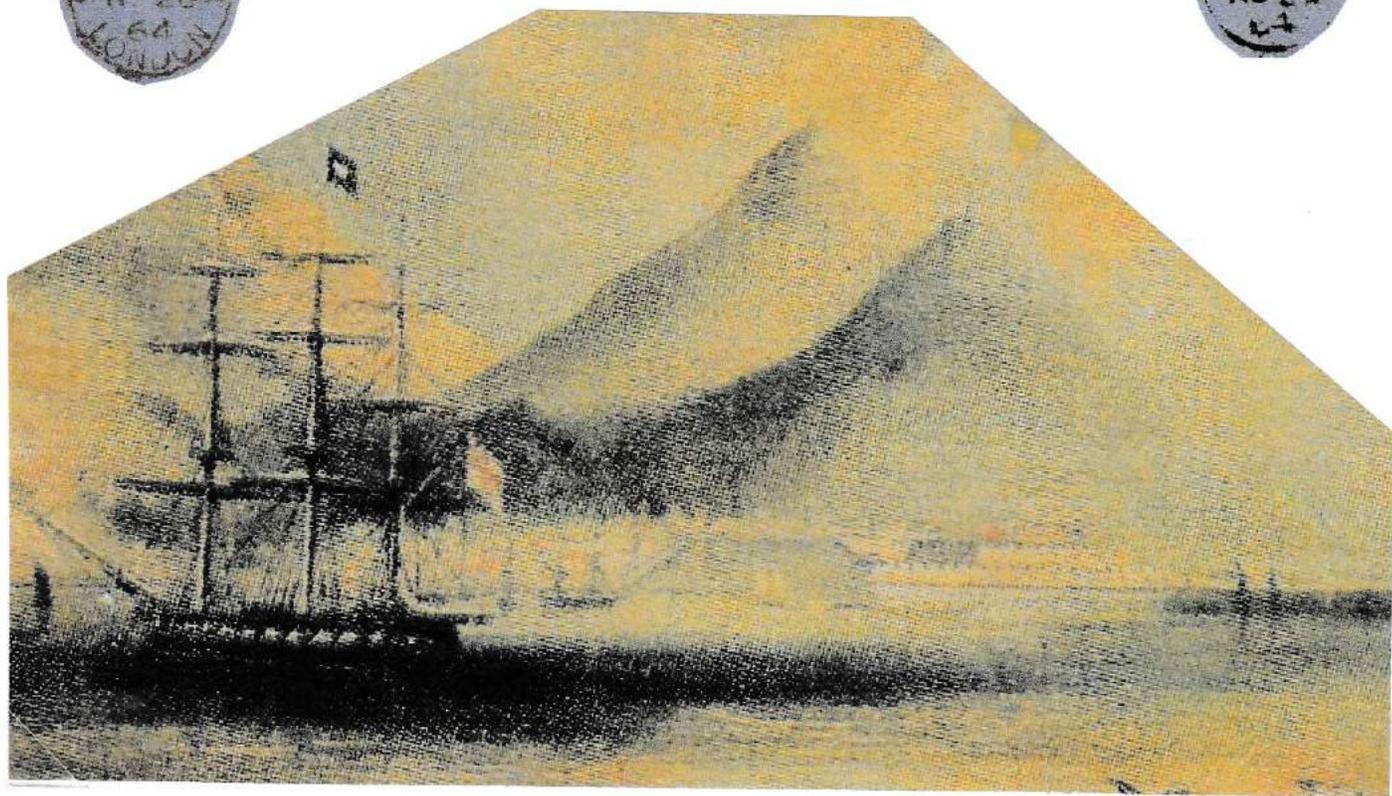


the Cape Packet rate was 6d per ½oz from 1857

The DIAMOND LINE

The Diamond Line was formed in late 1863 and competed with the Union Line especially by serving Algoa Bay and thus the Eastern Cape and Natal. The *Eastern Province* made the first trip arriving on 28 August 1864, thereafter 2-monthly with her sister ship *Kaffraria*.

24 Oct. 1864 franked DLR 4d picked up by *Eastern Province* on her 2nd return trip from Algoa Bay. Written by the famous artist Thomas Baines to his sister in Lynn. Unusually for contract mail picked up a "SHIP LETTER / LONDON" receipt 28 Nov 1864. Lynn next day.



A Dutch EastIndiaman at Table Bay - Thomas Baines

The DIAMOND LINE

The *Uitenhage* and *Albany* were larger ships (1200 tons) added to the Diamond Line fleet. A smaller coaster *Natalian* carried mail from Port Elizabeth to Cape Town. *Uitenhage* had a disastrous maiden trip setting off the day before *Saxon* but arriving at Cape Town 28 days after it and acquired the nickname of the "rotten egg"!

31 Oct 1866 franked 4d Cape rectangular at Port Elizabeth. The *Natalian* left on 2 November arriving at Cape Town on the 5th. Mail switched to *Uitenhage* for its last trip to Falmouth 7 December, London next day and Dundee and Broughty Ferry 9 December.



Some doubt has been cast on this having been carried by *Uitenhage* because of reports it was decommissioned in 1865. Records do show, however that this was her last trip.

The Diamond Line had many problems including losing *Eastern Province* at Quoin Point on her fourth homeward trip. She ran aground but without loss of life. Passengers and crew were taken by ox-wagon to Bredasdorp and then on to Cape Town.

Their sailings became more erratic and less reliable. Their negotiators weren't popular. They insisted on leaving Falmouth the day before the Union Line instead of sensible spacing. So, after a promising start things went from bad to worse and they went into liquidation in 1867.

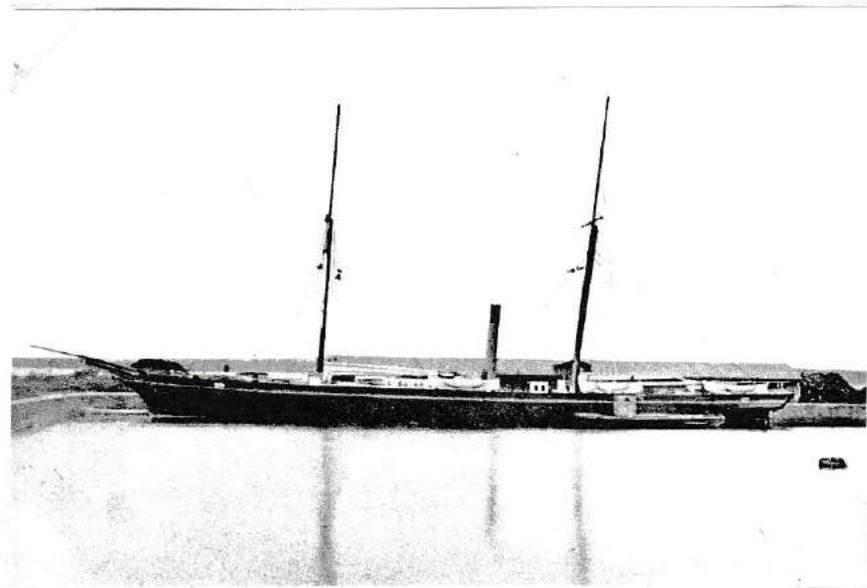
One benefit they left, however, was that they had forced the Union Line to extend its services eastward and this remained

MAIL FROM THE ORANGE FREE STATE

April 1865 envelope from the Farie correspondence (known to originate from Bloemfontein) to Scotland. Manuscript "6" paying the local postage and franked Cape 1/- (from stocks held in Bftn) but cancelled at Cape Town 13 April and paying the packet rate



Carried on the Union steamer *Saxon* (II) which left Cape Town 16 April arriving at Devonport ("Paid/ Packet") in red, on 16 May. Glasgow transit 18 May.
One of only eight recorded covers with this franking

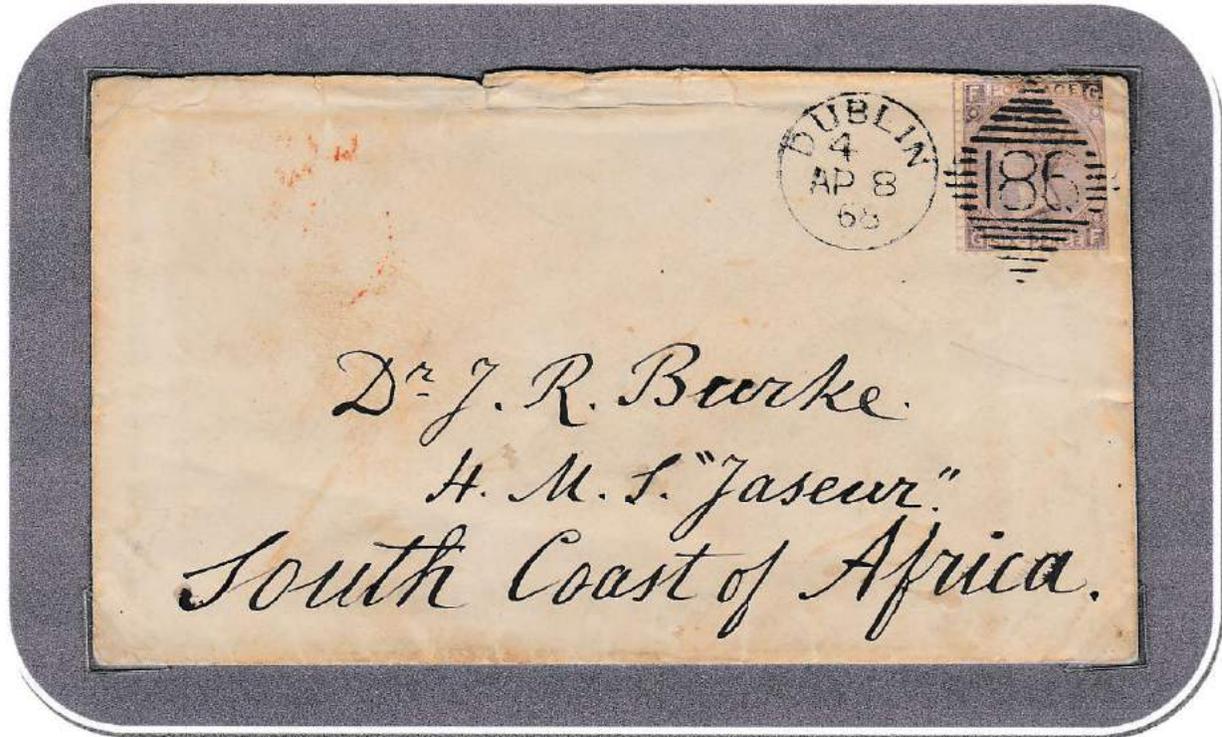


Union RMS *Saxon* (II), 1863

UNION STEAM SHIP COMPANY'S THIRD CONTRACT
1868-72

NAVAL OFFICER'S LETTER

8 Apr 1868 envelope from Dublin to a Dr Burke onboard HMS *Jaseur* simply addressed "South Coast of Africa", franked 6d (Plt.6) being the military officers' concessionary rate



London transit for 9 April but no other postal markings. Presumably carried by the *Roman* which sailed from Plymouth 10 April (her 1st sailing under the 3rd contract)

ex Dickson who was in communication with Geoffrey Osborne regarding the cover. The latter obtained the log for HMS *Jaseur* which was on anti-slavery patrol on the west coast of Africa. This states she left Banana (small port on the northern side of the Congo estuary) for coal and provisions at Luanda (then St Paul de Loanda) on 11 May 1869 returning to Banana 25 May before leaving for Ascension where she arrived 10 July. It is likely Dr Burke received the letter there.

UNION LINE MAIL

A NAVAL OFFICER'S MAIL FROM CAPE TOWN

The Officers' concessional rate was 6d per ½ oz (packet rate was 1/-).
The 6d GB (1867 wmk spray, SG104) adhesive was put on in Cape Town.

5 Jan 1869 the letter was posted in Cape Town with 2 CDSs not cancelling the stamp
It was carried on the *Roman* reaching Devonport 7 Feb. Here red cds was applied and
the stamp cancelled the Devonport "250" numeral. The accountancy ms "1" being the
money due to the Cape was delete to avoid confusion.



b/s Derry receipt 8 February

Captain The Honourable Ernest Grey Lambton Cochrane is writing to his wife in Ireland.
He captained *HMS Peterel* from 1869-'71, starting in Cape Town then moving up the west
African coast. *Peterel* was an 11 gun, 849 ton, wooden screw sloop.
It ended its life as a lightship off Ireland

UNION STEAM SHIP COMPANY'S THIRD CONTRACT
1868-72

9 Oct 1868 EL from London to the Lord Bishop of Grahamstown franked 3x 4d (Plt.10)
paying the 1/- packet rate and carried by the *Saxon* on her first trip under the new contract



Saxon left Plymouth 10 October arriving at Cape Town 11 November
back stamped Grahamstown receipt 15 November

UNION STEAM SHIP COMPANY'S THIRD CONTRACT
1868-72

ARMY OFFICERS' 6d CONCESSIONARY RATE

7 Nov 1868 envelope to a Lt Col Hawes of the 1st Btn 9th Regiment at Cape Town
posted at Twickenham franked 6d (Plt.6)



b/s Devonport "bagging mark" same day, "Cape Packet / Devonport" cds for 8th and carried by *Roman* (along with the previous official cover) leaving on the 10th arriving in Cape Town on 14 December

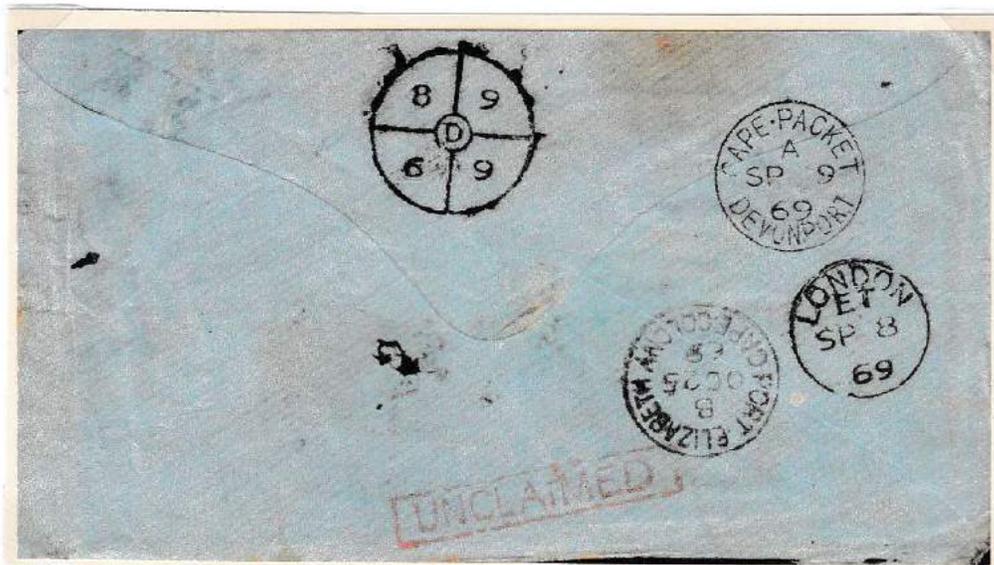
UNION LINE MAIL

7 Sep 1869 envelope to the captain of the barque *Mary Nelson* care of the British Consul in Port Elizabeth from South Shields franked 1/- (Plt.4) paying the packet rate. London transit and bagging mark same day. "Cape Packet / Devonport" cds on 9th and carried on the *Dane* which left on the 10th arriving at Cape Town October 17



Arrived at Port Elizabeth a week later on 25th. Not collected so advertised.
"ADVERTISED / AND / UNCLAIMED" in black on front. Boxed "UNCLAIMED" in red on back

Reverse



THE CAPE & NATAL STEAM NAVIGATION COMPANY

The discovery of diamonds in 1867 significantly affected the desirability of running shipping lines to South Africa. Late in 1870 Payne & Co sent 2 ships on a trial run. Despite one ending on the rocks off Seal Island, in 1872 the C&NSNCo was formed. The ships were mostly chartered which proved uneconomic but they were more comfortable and faster than those of the Union Line. They carried mail as "ship letters". The company folded in 1872.

21 Dec 1871 envelope from Shanklin (IoW) to Mowbray franked block of four 1d Plt.145 paying the ship letter rate with a "2" accountancy h/s showing that due to the Cape. Carried on SS *Medway* which left Dartmouth 23 Dec. Cape Town receipt 24 Jan 1872



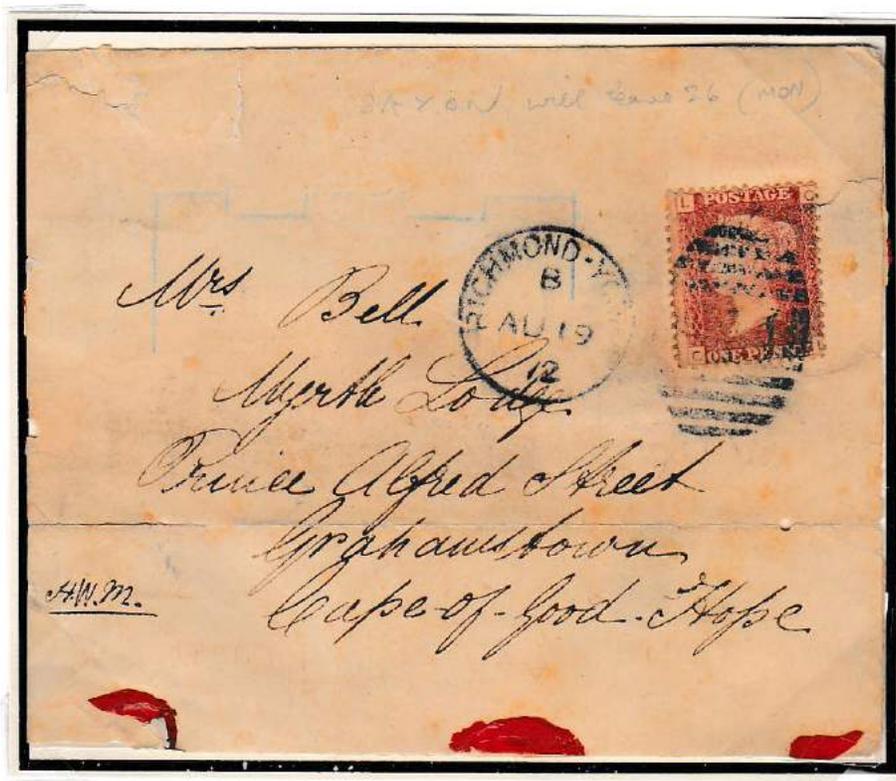
The *Medway* was chartered and this was her only trip

UNION LINE MAIL

PRINTED PAPER RATE (1d per ounce)

A lot of papers were carried but very few wrappers remain

19 Aug 1872 wrapper from Richmond, Yorkshire to Grahamstown franked 1d (Plt.153)
paying the tariff of 21 June 1869. A pencil note by the sender says "Saxon will leave 26
(Mon)" - there are no other postal markings, transit, or receipt, but Saxon did leave on
26 August presumably with this in a bag on board



1872-6 THE DISCREPANCY IN RATES WHILST CONTRACT DETAILS
ARGUED OVER

5 Feb 1874 mourning envelope from Grahamstown (*b/s* proving cds for "3" numeral)
carried on the *Walmer Castle* leaving Cape Town 10th Feb and reaching Dartmouth 9th March
with Halifax receipt next day cost 4d



16 Feb 1874 similar from Cape Town carried on the *Danube* leaving the same day and
arriving at Southampton 15 March & Salisbury next day cost 1/-



The Union Line used Southampton 1873/4 - *Danube's* trip was the last before reverting to Plymouth

THE FIRST CURRIE "CASTLE" LINERS

Walmer Castle (I) (The 1st "Castle" to reach Cape Town)

21 Mar 1874 St Johns Wood to Cape Town franked 4d (Plt.13), carried on *Walmer Castle*
reaching Cape Town 17 April. "2^{dn}" accountancy handstamp



Edinburgh Castle (I)

22 Dec 1874 London to Graaff Reinet franked 4d (Plt.12) carried on *Edinburgh Castle*
reaching Cape Town 16 Jan '75 "2^{dn}" accountancy handstamp



In 1871 Currie ordered his first "Castle" liners, *Dover* and *Walmer*, from Barclay Curle of Glasgow. 2,300 & 2,400 tons respectively *Dover Castle* was first in the water but chartered by the Pacific Line and failed to return from her maiden trip because of fire. *Walmer Castle* made her maiden trip to Cape Town in 1872 which would likely have been a record had she not made an experimental stop at

MAIL FROM THE ORANGE FREE STATE

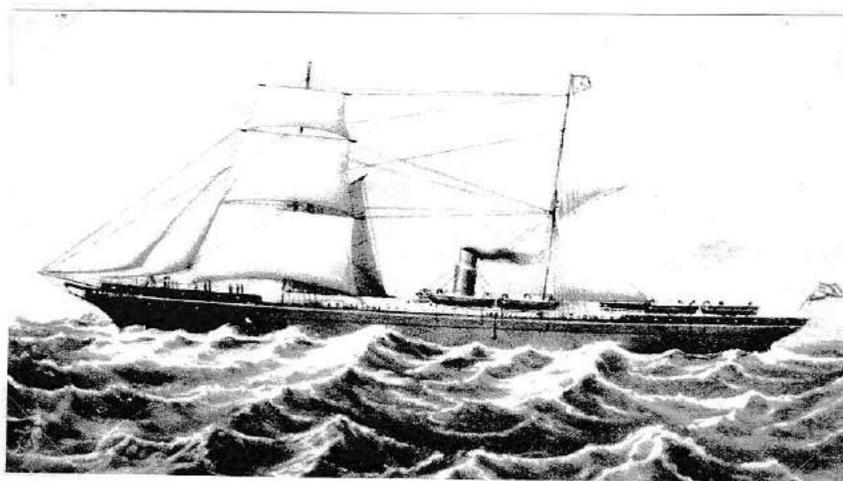
A double rate combination cover

23 Sep 1875 envelope from Bloemfontein to England OFS 6d (x2) cancelled Bloemfontein "1" for carriage to the Cape border and Cape 4d (pair) for carriage through that Colony plus 1/- (pair) being double the packet rate, the Cape stamps cancelled Cape Town "1"



2001 PFSA certificate

Carried on the Union steamship *African (1)* which left on 5th October with Cape Packet / Plymouth receipt for "Oc 31" and South Molton receipt next day

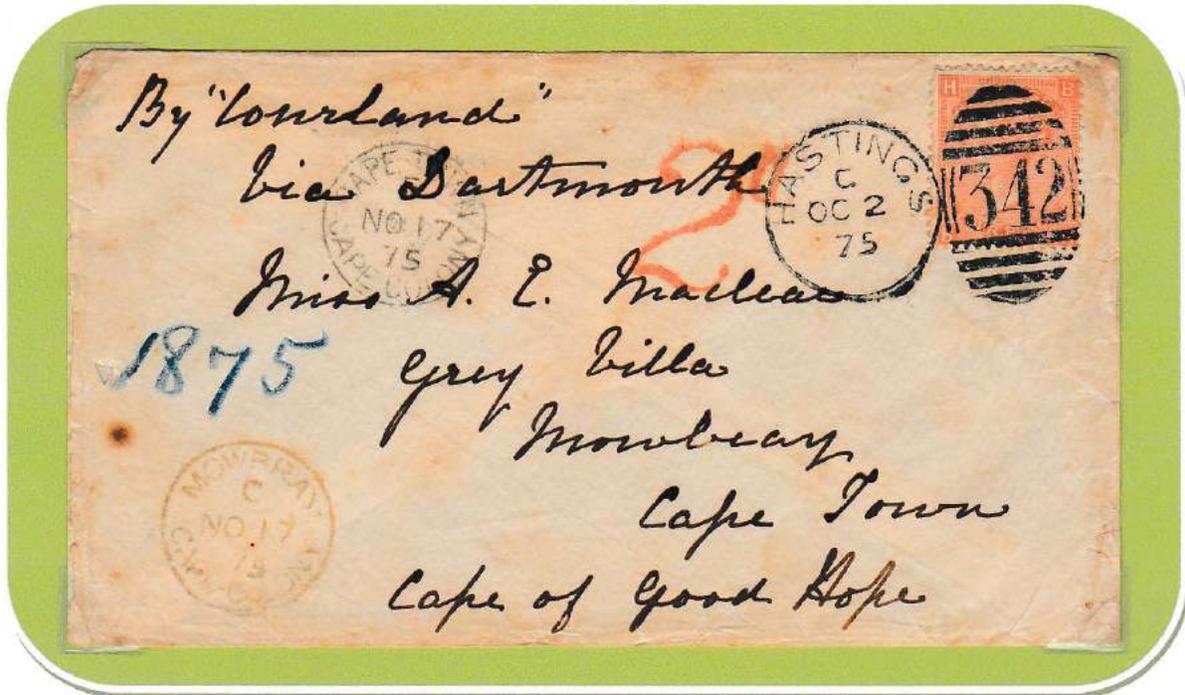


Union RMS *African (1)*. 1873

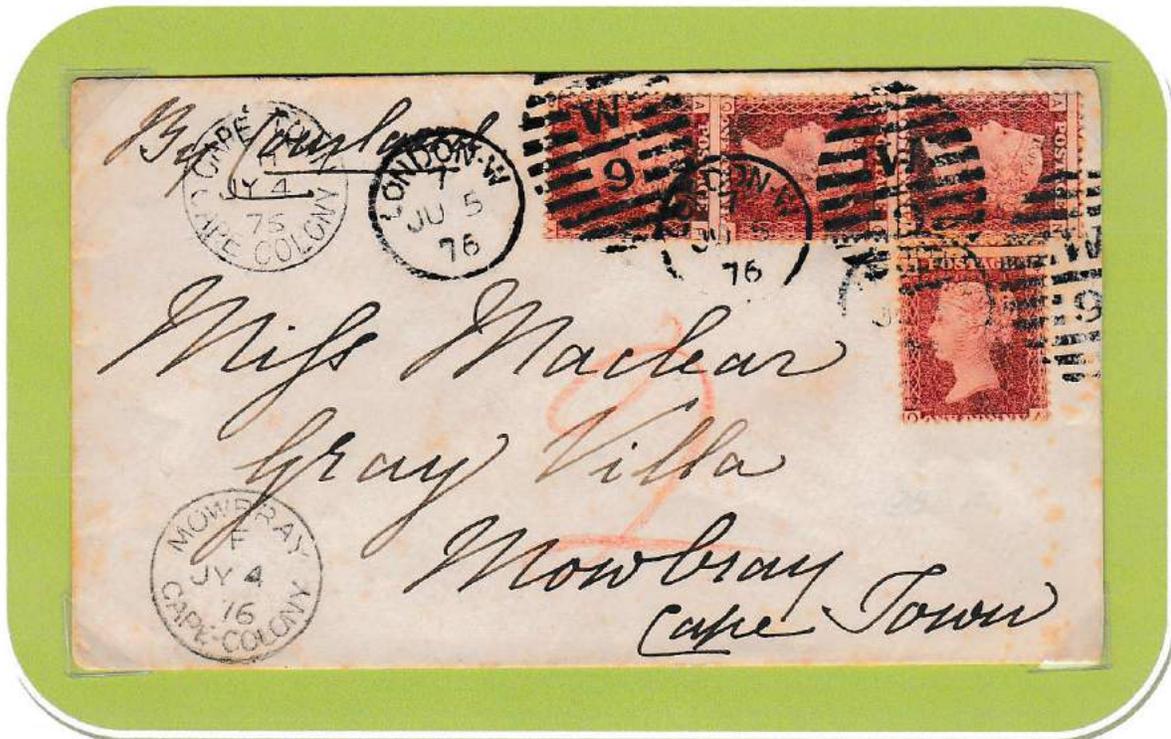
EARLY DONALD CURRIE SHIP LETTERS

ex the Maclear correspondence

2 Oct 1875 from Hastings to Mowbray franked 4d (Plt.14) marked "By Courland" but missing the sailing and carried on Windsor Castle leaving Dartmouth 23 October arriving at Cape Town 17 November. Mowbray receipt same day. "2nd" accountancy handstamp

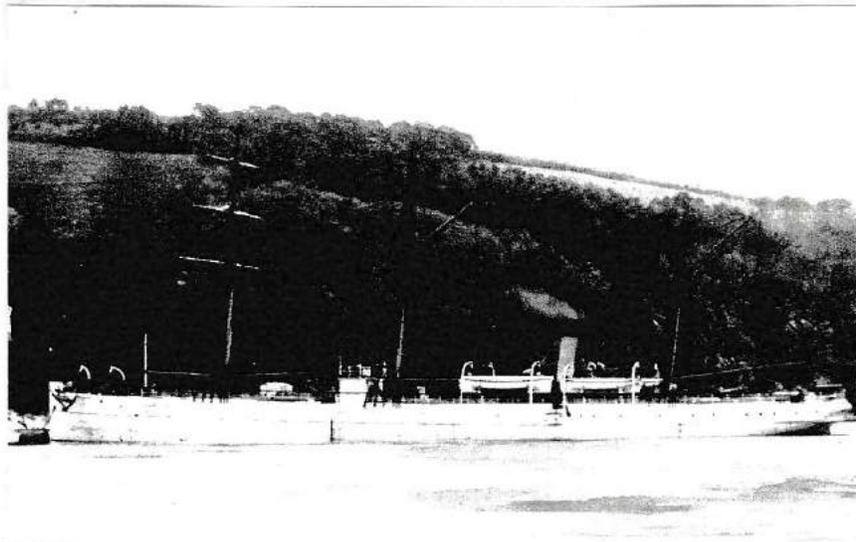
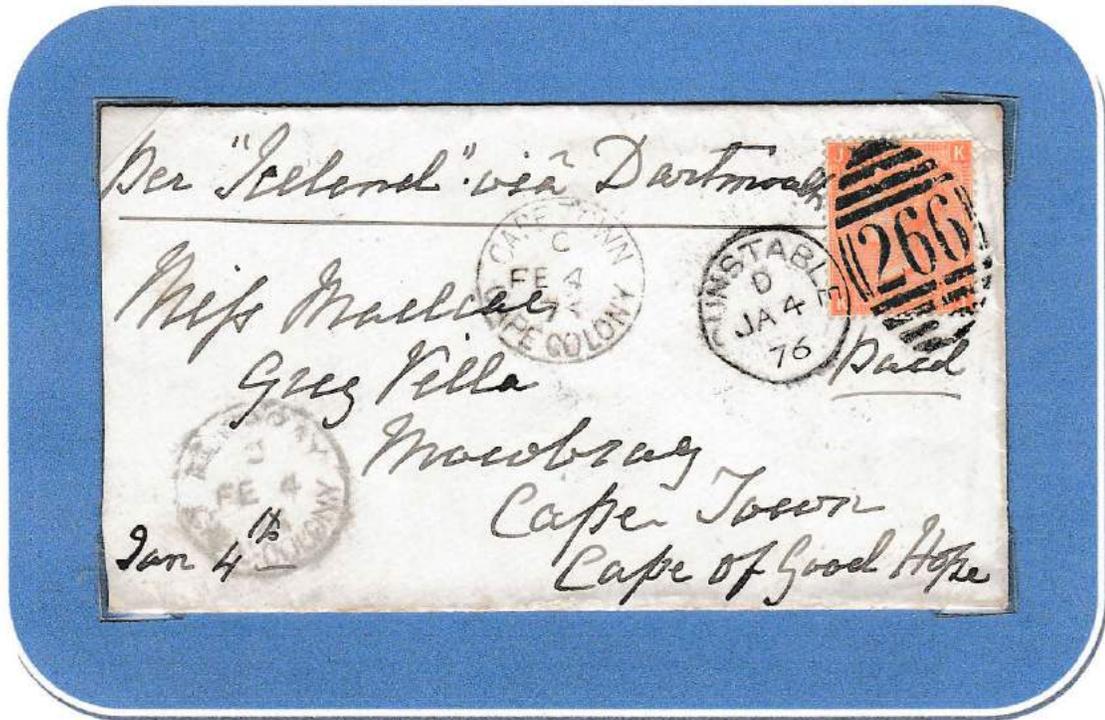


5 Jun 1875 to Mowbray franked four 1d (Plt.158) making the Courland which left Dartmouth the same day reaching Cape Town 3 July & Mowbray on 4th. ms "2" accountancy



EARLY DONALD CURRIE SHIP LETTERS

4 Jan 1876 envelope from the Maclear correspondence from Dunstable franked 4d (Plt.14)
carried on *Iceland* arriving at Cape Town & Mowbray 4 February



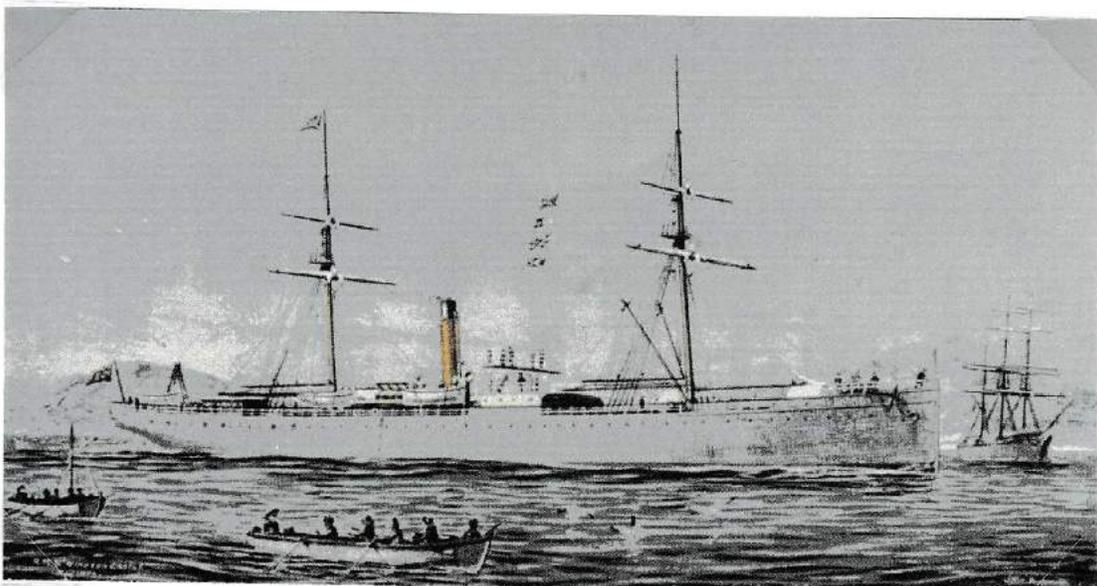
Iceland the first chartered ship acquired by Currie and which did the first trip in 1872, in conjunction with Payne who couldn't come up with the finance, to Cape Town

A LETTER TO DONALD CURRIE

22 May 1876 envelope from Donald Currie & Co. 3&4 Fenchurch S^T, London (embossed crest on flap) to his agent (Edward Turner) in Dartmouth for forwarding to South Africa. Franked 3x1d Plt.182 with "CURRIE" perfins, two of which pay the late fee to enable the letter to catch the GWR 8.10pm train for Dartmouth.



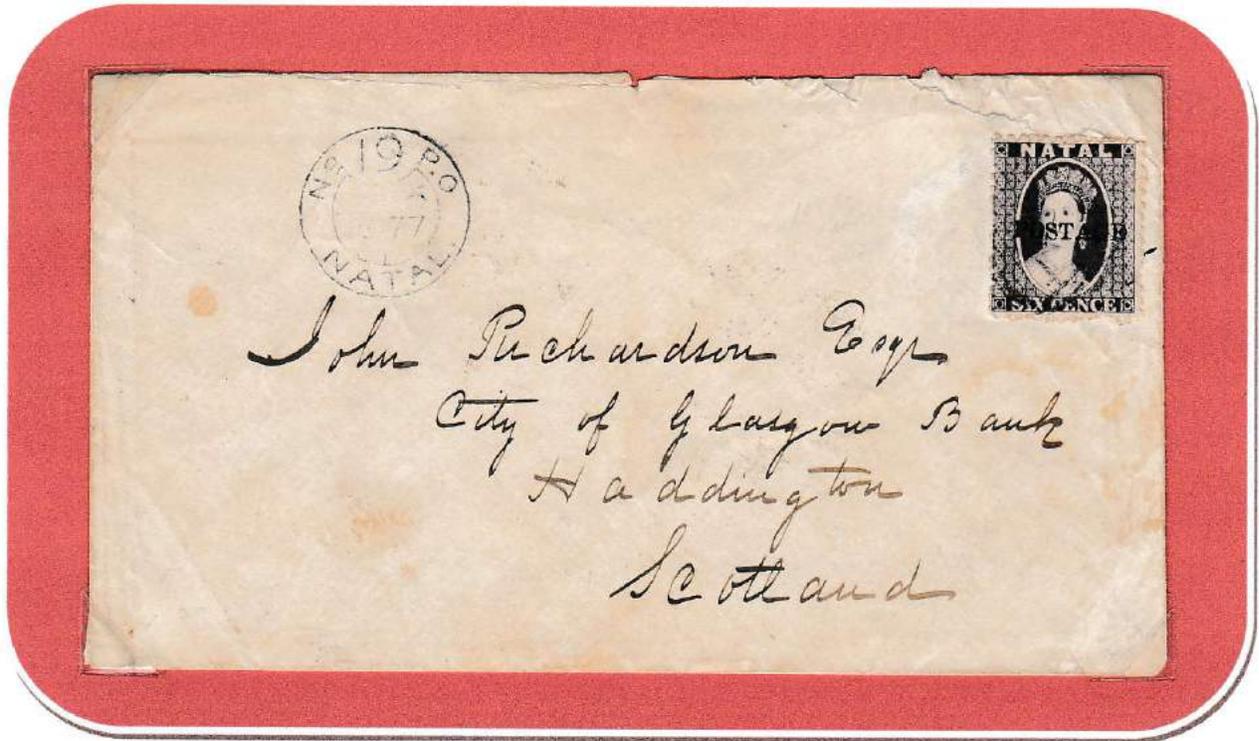
The letter arrived at Dartmouth 23rd just in time to be carried privately on *Windsor Castle* (I)
Details of the 1876 ("new") contract were on this sailing



Windsor Castle (I) 1873 - from a watercolour by John Juritz
She was wrecked 19 Oct 1876 when hitting rocks by Dassen Island (near CT) at night

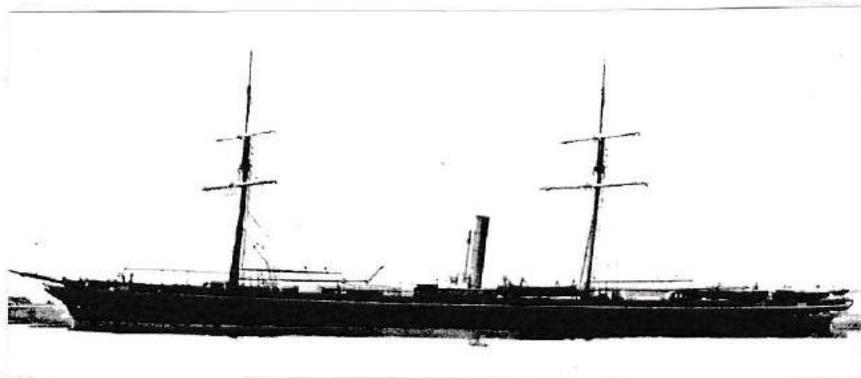
CASTLE / UNION LINE ITEM

9 June 1877 envelope from Ladysmith ("19" shield postmark) on "POSTAGE" ovpt 6d
Left Cape Town on 19 June. Should have been on the new *Taymouth Castle* but (*vide infra*)
that was in quarantine so carried instead on the Union Line *Danube*

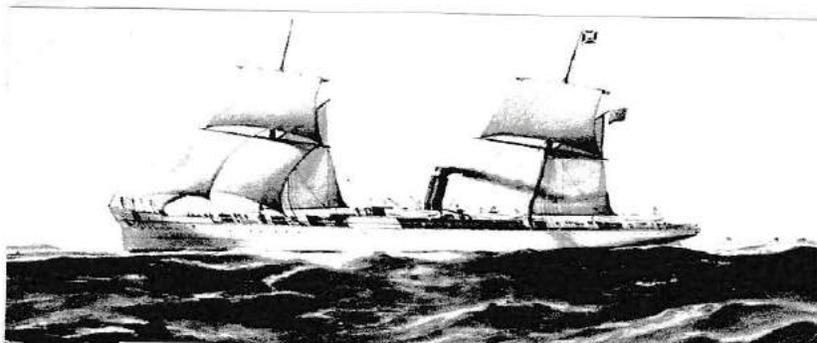


arrived Plymouth 12 July
"CAPE PACKET / PLYMOUTH" cds

Taymouth Castle's maiden voyage ended in Cape Town in May 1877 with several cases of smallpox on board.
She was immediately sent to Saldanha Bay for 6 weeks quarantine much to the passengers' chagrin.



UNION R.M.S. DANUBE, 1872



UNION LINE MAIL

26 Apr 1881 Cape Town to Bordeaux franked nice combination making up 10½d rate
with red 2½d ship charge. "P. R.M.S. Arab"



RMS Arab

- 1879 built by Thompson, Glasgow. 3,170 tons, 350'x42', 12 knots employed on Cape mail run until
- 1883 transferred, along with *Nubian*, to the Liverpool-Baltimore run
- 1885 was the base ship at Suakim (Gordon relief expedition)
- 1889 fitted with triple expansion engine & high pressure boilers
- 1891 transferred to the Intermediate Service inaugurating the Cape-Mauritius run
- 8 Mar 1900 was one of the available Union line ships at the merger but was surplus to requirements and sold to a German company and broken up.

1876-93 EARLY CASTLE LINE MAIL

KINFAUNS CASTLE (I)

20 Sep 1881 from Cape Town to the Isle of Wight, franked 6d

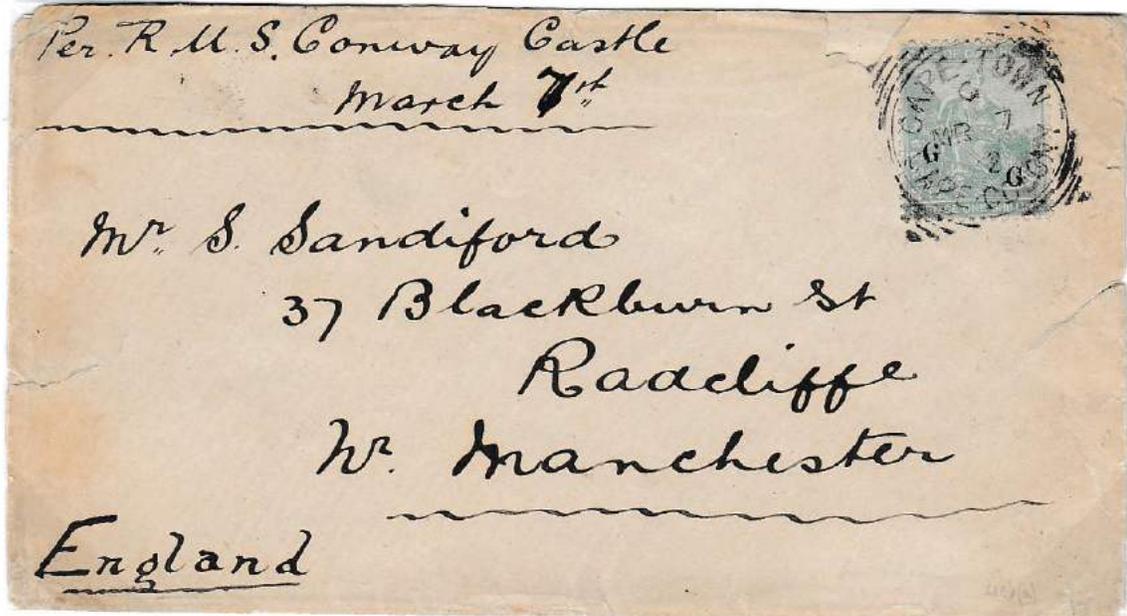


Kinfauns Castle (I) had a short life with the Castle Line. Built in 1880 along with her sister ship *Grantully Castle* she was sold to the Russian Volunteer Fleet in 1883.

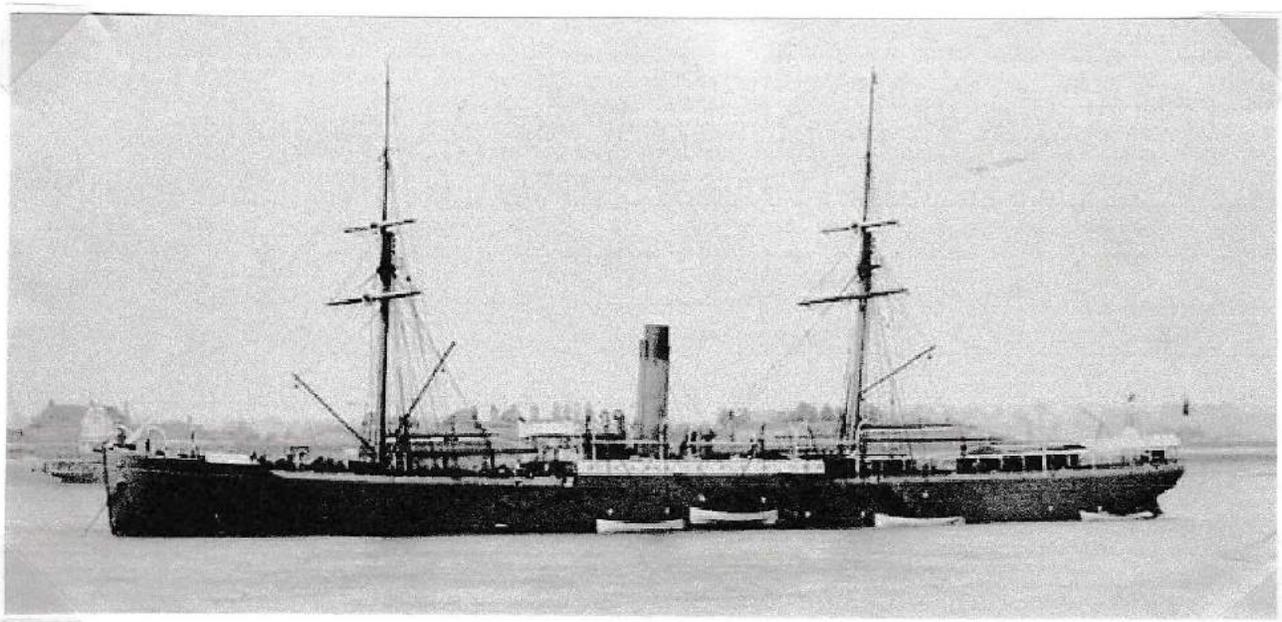
The Phoenix Park massacre took place in 1882. On the day he took oath as Chief Secretary for Ireland, Lord Cavendish and Mr Burke (his undersecretary) were stabbed and killed by a gang of Fenians. One of 6 men arrested, Carey, turned Queen's evidence resulting in the hanging of the other five. Carey was then to be smuggled out of England with his wife and six children aboard the *Kinfauns Castle* bound for Port Elizabeth. The Fenians got wind of this and one of their members, O'Donnell, also boarded the ship under an assumed name and befriended Carey. At Cape Town they were all transferred to the coaster *Melrose* for passage to Algoa Bay (Port Elizabeth) and shared a cabin. The day after leaving Cape Town, 29 July 1883, O'Donnell shot Carey dead and was then put in chains and returned to England and hung in December the same year. This all made big news in South Africa.

EARLY CASTLE LINE MAIL

7 Mar 1882 Cape Town to Manchester "Per RMS Conway Castle, March 7th"
franked 1879 Cape 1/-, overprinted "G", doubled



Used after Griqualand merged with Cape Colony but this stamp was from the returned and re-distributed stock to & from Cape Town *Holcombe certificate*



R.M.S. Conway Castle

MILITARY MAIL

THE WARREN EXPEDITION

The new Boer states of Stellaland & Goshen (in southern Bechuanaland) merged in Aug.'83 causing Rhodes some consternation. The Warren expedition, consisting of 4,000 troops, was assembled under Maj-Gen Sir Charles Warren in late 1884 to re-assert Cape interests.

Col (later Lord) Methuen led Methuen's Horse, a significant part of the expedition.

written 4 Jan, cancelled 5 Jan 1885 at Orange River Station with "525" numeral (pictured on p29 Putzel Vol.8 as the proving cover) by Methuen to his wife in London. Franked a Cape 6d (the officer's & packet rates now both 6d). b/s Cape Town 7th & London 27th January



The arrival of the first detachment of Methuen's Horse at Barkly Camp
The Illustrated London News 14 Mar 1885 p.274

MILITARY CONCESSIONARY MAIL

24 Feb 1885 envelope from L/Cpl Leach of the Northampton Regiment at Cape Town
franked 1d (the concessionary rate for other ranks), to Northampton

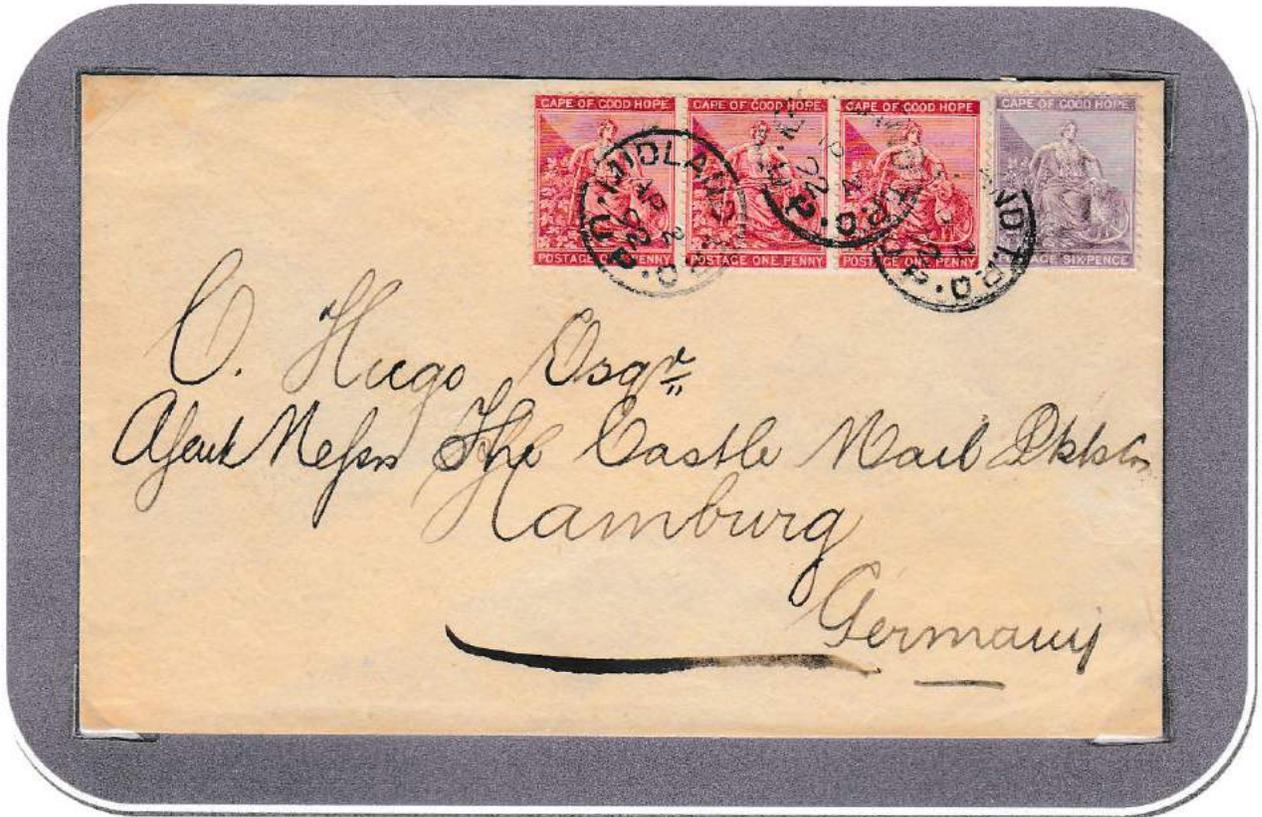


countersigned by J Little the acting adjutant

Northampton receipt 18 March

CASTLE LINE MAIL

2 Apr 1892 envelope from the Castle Line Agency at Port Elizabeth (embossed on flap),
posted directly on to the Midland TPO which involved a 6d late fee, to their office in
Hamburg (receipt cds states 23 May arrival)



The Midland TPO ran from Port Elizabeth up to De Aar and then down to Cape Town.
The "UP" relates to towards Cape Town.
Officially the cover should have had a "LATE FEE" handstamp applied

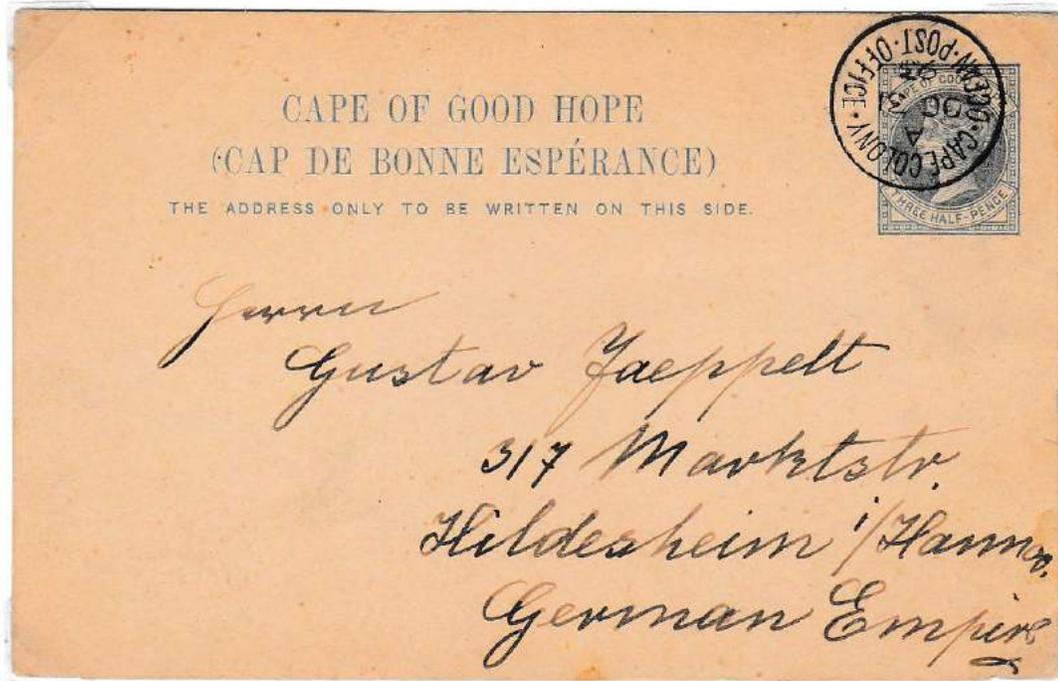


It's unlikely that the letter really took 7 weeks to reach Hamburg

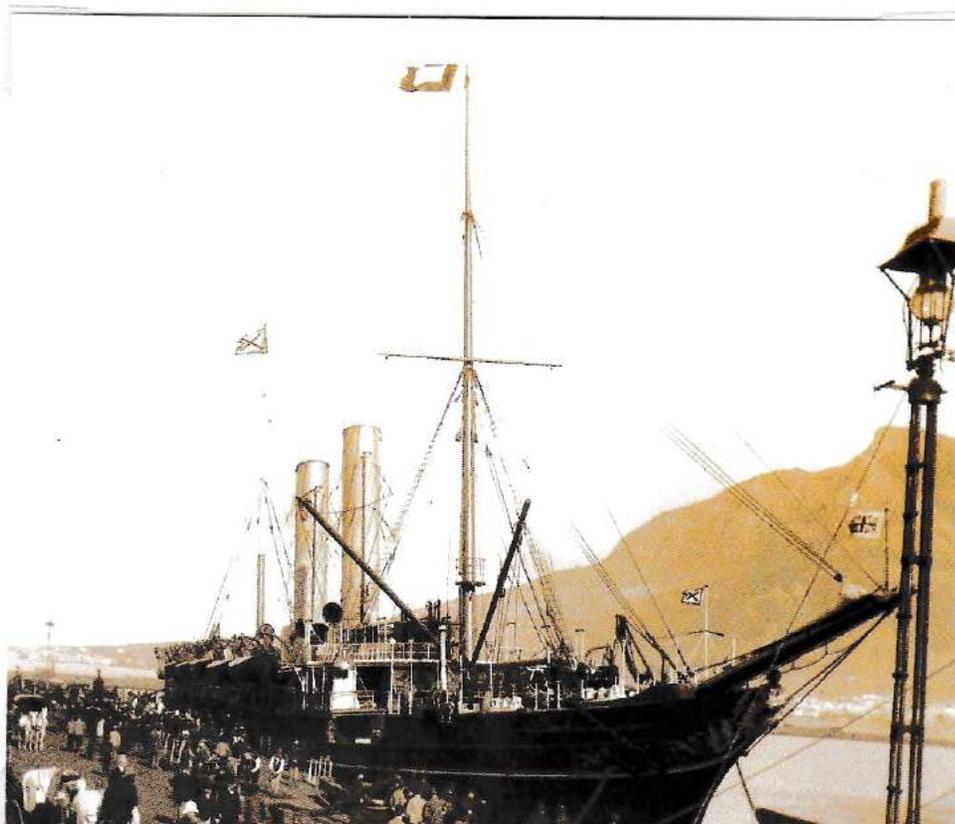
MARITIME - 1 Oct. 1893 CAPE COLONY OCEAN POST OFFICE

After protracted renegotiation a new mail contract was signed. The length of the voyage was reduced to 19 days and both Lines departed from Southampton at 4pm on Saturdays (had previously been noon on Fridays). The homeward voyage left Cape Town at 4pm on Wednesdays (as previously) but the requirement to visit anywhere other than Madeira was transferred to the "Intermediate" service. The mails were landed at Plymouth after which Union ships terminated at Southampton & the Castles at the East India Docks in London. The other new feature was the establishment of the on board post office.

31 October 1893 a Cape 1½d ps postcard paying the correct overseas postcard rate, cancelled Cape Colony / Ocean Post Office, code "A" of the Scot



Posted at Madeira on the Scot's first voyage southwards with a post office on board. It was also the record trip being completed in 14 days, 18 hrs, 57 minutes, a record not equalled for nearly 50 years!





The End

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A grateful South African Philately Club thanks

Tony Howgrave-Graham

for sharing his collection with us.

11/11/2020

If you have questions or want to contact Tony, his email address is:

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