



THE ATLANTIC SEA-POSTS OF THE CAPE OF GOOD HOPE TO 1883

Volume 1 The Text Volume 2 Appendices

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Cape of Good Hope to 1883**

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This work documents one hundred years of Atlantic sea-posts of the Cape of Good Hope starting with the Dutch posts at the end of the 18th century and ending in 1883 by which date the Union and Castle packet services were well established.

This work is divided into 21 Parts (chapters) as follows:

- Part 1 The Dutch posts to and from the Cape prior to 1794
- Part 2 British seapost to and from the Cape between 1784 and 1805
- Part 3 Scotland and Ireland to 1805
- Part 4 British ship letter post to and from the Cape between 1805 and 1814
- Part 5 Withdrawn ship letters of 1814 and the India packet post of 1815
- Part 6 India letters between 1819 and 1839
- Part 7 Ireland from 1805 to 1839
- Part 8 British ship letter post from 1839 to 1850
- Part 9 The General Screw Steam Shipping Company's packet service 1850 to 1854
- Part 10 Shipping to and from the Cape between 1854 and 1856
- Part 11 The scheme for a unified colonial letter rate of 6d.
- Part 12 The Lindsay packet service from 1856 to 1857
- Part 13 The Union Steamship Company's first contract from 1857 to 1863
(including the East India & London Shipping Co from 1861 to 1864)
- Part 14 The Union Steamship Company's second contract from 1863 to 1868
- Part 15 The Diamond Steam Navigation Company from 1864 to 1868
- Part 16 The Union Steamship Company's third contract from 1868 to 1872
- Part 17 The early years of the Donald Currie service
- Part 18 The crisis of 1872 and 1873
- Part 19 The Union Steamship Company from 1872 to 1876
- Part 20 Donald Currie from 1873 to 1876
- Part 21 The Union and Castle packet contracts of 1876

These chapters provide a description of the mail service, the negotiations between the various departments of the British Government – the Post Office, the Admiralty and the Colonial Office in particular – and the Colonial administrations in South Africa, and the subsequent contracts.

Appendices to these chapters (there are no appendices to Parts 3, 7 and 18) provide lists of ship movements, copies of mail contracts and those extended documents relative to the mail service of the period as would be incongruous if included in the main text.

A bibliography is included at the end of each Part citing the sources referred to within it. Bibliographic references are repeated as necessary when also used in other Parts.

The story of maritime mail communication throughout this period is both fascinating and complex. Some packet services were of short duration for commercial or political reasons. Later in the 19th century services by private vessels rivalled contracted packet arrangements. Thus the challenge for the postal historian in interpreting individual covers can be far from straightforward.

This study aims to bring together all available information on shipping routes, sailing schedules and postal rates and regulations. The text explores in detail the context in which these arrangements developed – the negotiation of contractual arrangements between the shipping lines and government and postal authorities in the Cape and London and the keen and vocal expression of public interest in the services provided.

Research shows that a number of published texts on southern African mails suffer from major inaccuracies. For this reason quotation from original sources and early commentaries is used throughout this work. The source of the reference has been quoted in each case to enable future students to verify the accuracy of the statements made. On several occasions the spelling of some of the words in these quoted texts has been modernized.

This work is illustrated throughout with covers from the author's collection together with illustrations of relevant postal notices and other items of particular interest.

Cape laws were classed as Ordinances up to 1854, thereafter as Acts; Ordinances were numbered sequentially within the year in which they were proclaimed, Acts were numbered sequentially within the year in which they were passed by Parliament; citations are as in the First Schedule of Cape Act No.4, 1882, ee.g. Ord. No.1, 1846 and Act No.23, 1856. As to the citation of British and Irish Acts there are several authentic formulae, this work follows the style of Schedule A of Chapter 32 of 1837: 1 V. c. 32. Where such citations appear within quotations from other publications they are variously formatted.

The text of Treasury Warrants has been transcribed from originals recorded in *The Gazette* (London Gazette) available online at "www.thegazette.co.uk/data/".

This is not a study of postmarks and they are rarely shown except on the covers illustrated. References are made to the following:

For the Cape Robert Goldblatt, 1984 *Postmarks of the Cape of Good Hope*. Cape Town. Pp 267.

For Natal W. R. Hart, B. A. Kantey and A. Leslie Leon, 1977 *The postal markings of Natal*. Cape Town. Pp 168 + vi + map..

For the United Kingdom Alan Robertson, 1955-63. *The maritime postal history of the British Isles*. Privately published by the author, Pinner. "2 Vols."

OR Colin Tabcart, 1997 *Robertson revisited. A study of the maritime postal markings of the British Isles based on the work of Alan W Robertson*. Limassol. Pp 314 + xv.

For London Léon Dubus, 1969 *Les obliterations de Londres ...* Auxerre. 2 vols.

The ships involved in the Cape mail service during the period of this study ought to be more commonly and reliably illustrated than they are. The General Screw Steam Shipping Company's ships are well described and illustrated in www.historic-shipping.co.uk/gssco/ but available illustrations of the early steamers of the Union Company and of Donald Currie's line, the Diamond Line etc., are generally poor and unreliable.

The contracts for the Atlantic service to and from the Cape usually included description of the arrangements for the conveyance of mails to and from Ascension and St. Helena, and later Madeira. These arrangements are described in appropriate places in the text, but the laws and public notices of these islands are only briefly referred to and, in particular, the tables of actual shipping movements exclude the these islands. Practically nothing is included here on Madeira except for the incidental appearance of the island in notices issued by the GPO London. The history of the African Steamship Company service to West Africa is not included.

The island of Mauritius featured in the mail contracts for the Cape Atlantic service from an early date and the service to India by the General Screw Steam Ship Company via Mauritius is fully described. Subsequently an idealised alternative postal route via the Mediterranean and Mauritius found its way into the negotiations for the Atlantic service; insofar as these considerations affected the Atlantic mail service they are described in this study.

East-coast services to the United Kingdom via Mauritius or Galle or Zanzibar were spasmodically established, only to be abandoned when the arrangements proved to be of little consequence for commerce or for the carriage of mail between South Africa and the UK. The existence of these services is recorded, but the dates of sailing are not documented.

This study primarily relates to the mail service between the United Kingdom and the Cape of Good Hope. The laws and public notices of the United Kingdom and of the Cape Colony are fully presented.

The mails to and from Natal passing via the Cape are treated as part of the Atlantic posts as are those mails, in later years, to and from the inland republics of South Africa. Mails to and from the Atlantic islands are summarily documented.

The territory and later the colony of Natal was originally a dependency of the Cape Colony, and Natal was heavily reliant on the Cape for mail communication with the United Kingdom. For most of the period of this study Natal had no alternative but to send its UK mails to the Cape for transmission by the Atlantic route; mails to and from Natal were treated in the United Kingdom as part of the Cape Atlantic service. Natal's sea-post rates were generally the same as those of the Cape. For most of the period covered by this study Natal mails were conveyed between Cape Town and Durban by coasting vessels. In preparing the tables of shipping movement for the early years of this study I have added notes on the maritime connections with Natal. For the middle years of this study communications between Cape Town and Durban have been included in tables in the appropriate appendices. These tables give details of shipping movements where these connected with the Cape Atlantic mails. In later years communication between Natal and the Cape was sufficiently regular to require no special reference; indeed after 1872 the sailings were so frequent that it is impossible in many cases to identify the vessel making any particular connection or carrying any particular item of mail. Natal laws and public notices are not quoted.

The Orange (River) Free State and the South African Republic (Zuid- Afrikaansche Republiek / Transvaal) authorities were interested in the Atlantic mail service, and were encouraged by London in this. These authorities communicated with the Cape rather than with London. The arrangements proposed by the Cape post office were not always understood or welcomed by the inland governments or public, and there were years of discontent before a satisfactory settlement was reached. These negotiations and settlements are briefly described.

Early versions of much of the text and many of the tables set out here first appeared in articles published over the last 20 years in the *Natal & Zululand Post* or in its successor, the *Cape & Natal Philatelic Journal*. The encouragement of successive editors of those journals, the kind words of members of the Cape & Natal Study Circle and the support of the Royal Philatelic Society London, has made it possible to put this information before a larger public.

This study ends in January 1883 when a new packet contract was made with the Union Steamship Company (Limited) for a fortnightly service to and from the Cape and an identical contract was made with the Castle Mail Packets Company (Limited) for service in the alternate weeks. With a regular joint weekly service and relatively routine official correspondence the chief interest in the postal history of the Cape mails is greatly diminished and this study has not been continued beyond 1883.

This work is presented in 21 Parts (or chapters). The main body of the work consists of a descriptive text with appropriate illustrations. Appendices cover details of sailings of vessels, private and contracted, together with those lengthy texts – contracts, legislation, parliamentary reports etc. - which are too cumbersome to include in the main text. These appendices bear the same numbers and general titles as the Parts of the text to which they relate.

The data are presented in two machine-readable files – one for the main text and one for the appendices. This enables the reader to have simultaneous access to a specific Part of the main text and to the Appendix relating to it.

Readers will set up these files at home according to their own preferences, bearing mind that there is no index to this work. Any index covering the detail of these texts would be too cumbersome to be of real value to the user. The Part headings serve as a general index. The machine readable format of the work enables the user to find any subject of particular interest by means of a word search. Any word search applied to the main text will identify that word or phrase in any of the 21 Parts of the text. To find a word or phrase in the Appendices requires a separate search. This enables the reader to hold a fixed place in the main text while making a search of the appendices.

However, the reader should be careful in selecting the word or words for any search. For example, a comprehensive search for references to the Union Steamship Company should include "Union Company" and "Union" as well as "Union Steamship Company". Shipping lines are also frequently referred to in abbreviated form – e.g. "General Screw Steam Shipping Company" as "GSSSCo". Searching the Appendices by ship's name should, however, be much more straightforward. A search for arrival or departure dates using the form "dd mmm" will produce a list of responses from which the reader may select the appropriate result.

Acknowledgements

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I am grateful to the staff of the Pietermaritzburg Archives Repository and the Western Cape Archives Repository & Records Service in Cape Town for permission to use unpublished material from their records; also to the National Library of South Africa, Cape Town, for copies of Cape Parliamentary Papers, Cape Laws and Cape Almanacs; to the staff of the Royal Mail Archive for their help with, and photocopies of, a variety of documents in their keeping; to the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, for copies of documents from their collections, and to the Guildhall Library for use of their microfilm resource. My thanks to the Librarian and Secretary at the Royal Philatelic Society, London for tracking down elusive publications. Thanks also to the staff of the Killie Campbell African Library, Durban, for copies of letters from the *Dear Louisa* correspondence.

I am grateful also to the staff of the Reference Library at Bridgwater, Somerset, latterly the Local Studies Centre at Taunton, for access to their records, including *The Times* on microfilm; also to the *Dartmouth Chronicle* and to the staff of the Local History Museum at Kingsbridge, Devon, to the staff of the Cornwall Centre at Redruth, and to the Plymouth Public Library and the libraries of Exeter University.

I also gratefully acknowledge the valuable on-line data of *The London Gazette*, the South African *Tanap* and the Dutch *Huygens Ing* and *GaheNA*; these data have been invaluable. The recently improved search facilities of the South African National Archives and Records Service (NAAIRS) have been of particular use. I appreciate the help of Vincent Kalkhoven with the Dutch records.

The first version of the shipping lists for Cape packets was compiled by Peter Wingent and I am particularly indebted to him for allowing me to build on his work.