

Letter rates from the Cape Colony to the UK 1840–1900

The aim of the exhibit presented here is to describe the postal service from the Cape Colony to Britain over a 60-year period during 1840–1900 where it experienced dramatic changes.

Background

Great Britain took control over the Cape of Good Hope area from the Dutch in 1795–1802 during the Napoleonic war. From 1806 the control became permanent. With the control of the area the British administrated the postal service together with the Cape Colony after it was established. The Cape Colony was responsible for the inland mail and the UK for the shipping.

This story starts in 1840 at the time of the British postal reform. The rate was changed from being dependent on distance and the number of sheets to just being dependent on weight. All postage rates displayed in this exhibit applies to ½ oz letters. Table 1 provides the date of the changes in postage for packet and ship letters in addition to giving the page no of the exhibit item. Port charge was in effect until 1857.

The postage

From 1840 to 1900 the postage decreased from one shilling (12d) to one penny. However, the rate did not just go down as it had an upward hike between 1863 to 1876. The rate was increased from 6d to one shilling (1/-) because the UK was running a deficiency in the postal service. The losses were 9d on each letter which was not sustainable. The responsibility of the postal service from the Cape Colony to the UK was split. The Cape Colony was to provide the inland service and the port charge. Until 1857 it was not possible to pre-pay the postage all the way to Britain, because the UK took care of the oversea segment.

The oversea

The oversea mail could be sent by a private vessel (ship letters) or by a government contracted vessel (packet letters). A contracted vessel was obliged to follow a fixed timetable with a defined route, while a private vessel sailed whenever they had a cargo and followed the route of the cargo. Oversea

Table 1. Comparison of ship and packet letter rates.

Date	Ship rate	Packet rate	Page
10 Jan 1840	8d	-	2, 3
2 Feb 1851	8d	1s	4, 6
1 Aug 1857	6d		7
1 Apr 1863	4d	1s	8, 9, 10, 12
1 Jul 1876	6d		13
1 Oct 1888	4d		14
1 Jan 1891	2½d		15
1 Sep 1899	1d		16

Reduced rates (not in the table) applied for soldier letters (p. 5) and consignee letters (p. 11).

mail service relied entirely on ship mail prior to the 2nd of February 1851, with an exception in the period 1815–1819.

Treatment and presentation

The exhibit displays the change of postage rates with time for the parallel shipping system. Further, special rate for consignee's letter and soldier letters are addressed. The items are presented in chronological order following the changes in postage rate. A bar graph at each page shows the development in postage rate with respect to time and to those time periods where packet rates (top of the bar graph) differed from ship letters. The letter displayed on each page have a marker for the year of the item. The consignee's and soldier letters are not included in the bar graph.

Selection of material

This exhibit aims to represent all the different main variants of postage. To present the historic postage, only letters can be used as they give the whole story of their travels.

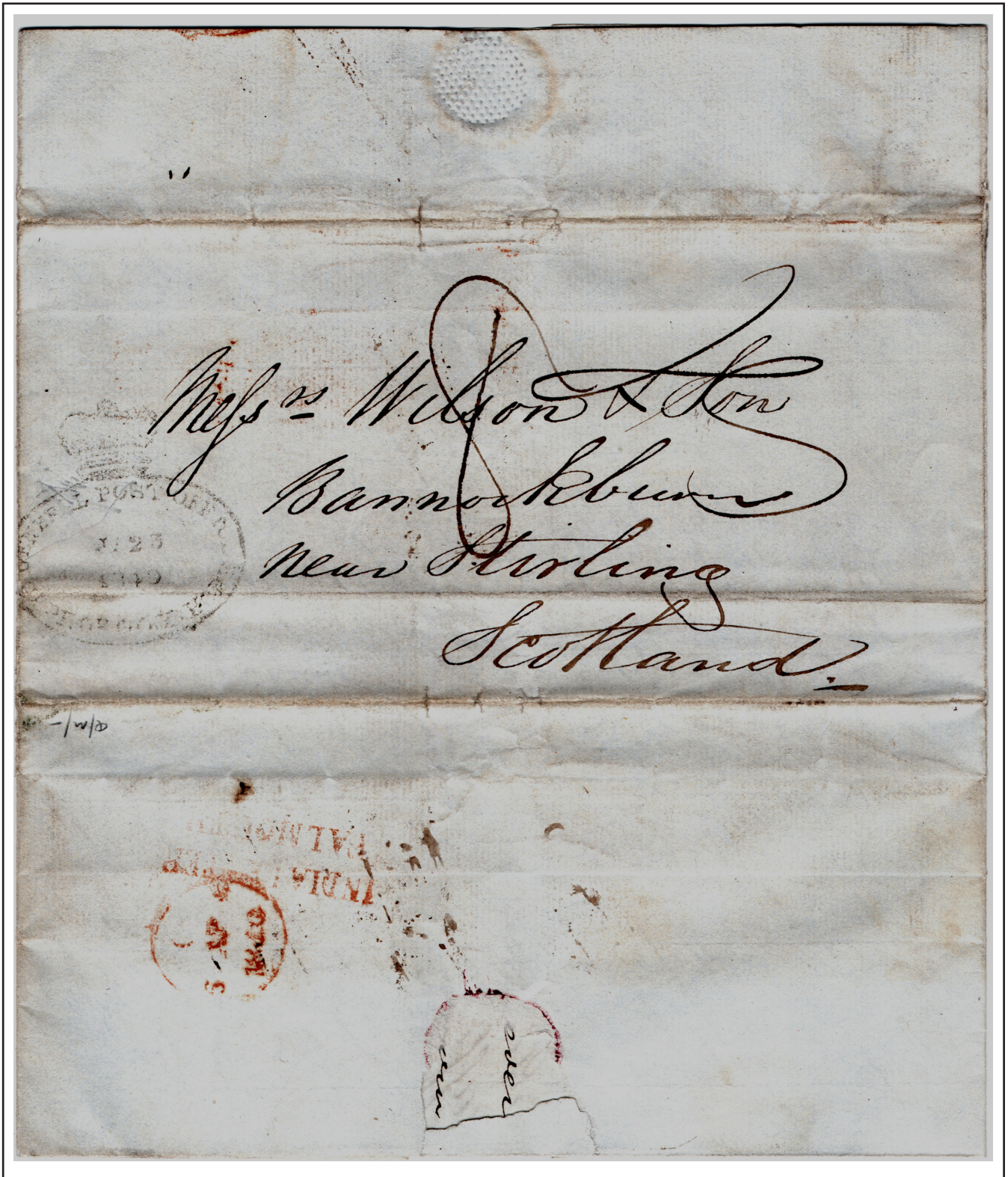
References

- Goldblatt, R., 1984. Postmarks of the Cape of Good Hope, Reijger Publishers (PTY) Ltd, pp. 267.
- Stevenson, D.A., 1950. The Triangular stamps of Cape of Good Hope. H.R. Harmer Limited, pp. 142.
- Trotter, B., 2016. Southern African Mails, Routes, Rates and Regulations 1806–1916, The Royal Philatelic Society London, pp 572.

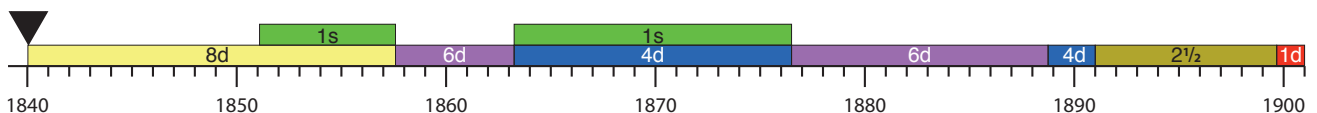
1840

The new postal rate, only dependent on weight, postage 4d + 8d

Ship letter from Cape Town to Scotland in 1840. Port charge of 4d paid in Cape Town and 8d to be paid on arrival in UK both in manuscript on the front. Stamped with the Third Dated Letter Stamp (DLS 4) in Cape Town at "JA 20 1840".



Also, the letter is stamped "INDIA LETTER FALMOUTH" on the reverse together with an arrival stamp "6 AP 1840". The travel time was 74 days.



1849
Ship letter, postage 4d + 8d

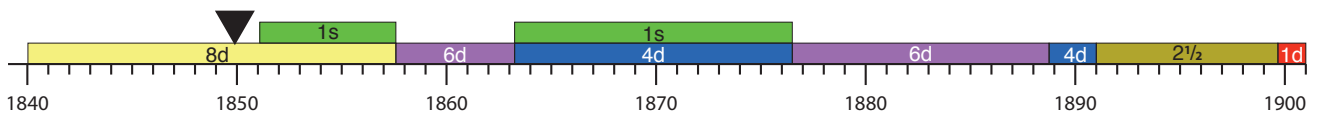
Ship letter 1849 from Cape Town to London.



The port charge (4d) paid in Cape Town and the 8d postage to be paid by the recipient. The letter is stamped with Cape Town GPO Crown, (type ULS 4) and "INDIA LETTER FALMOUTH".



On the reverse arrival stamp "NO 25 1849".



1851

Reintroduction of the Packet Letter rate, postage 4d (inland) + 4d + 1/-

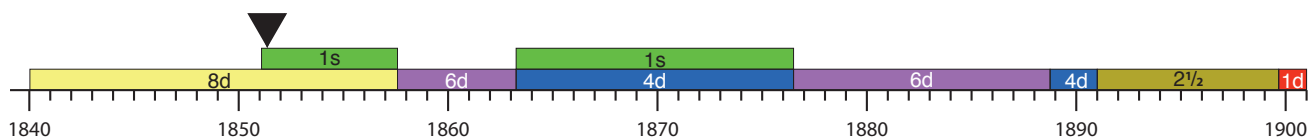
Letter from Victoria West (octagonal 54) passing through Cape Town (Cape Town GPO Crown, type ULS 2) to Thurso in Scotland (arrival MY 12 1851).



The letter is pre-paid with 8d, the inland rate (4d) and port charge (4d) written in manuscript "pp 8d". Also, annotated "per Steamer, or by first opportunity" and the packet letter rate "1/-" to pay.



On the reverse arrival stamp: Arrived to Thurso, Scotland MY 12 1851.



1855

Soldier letter from the Eastern Frontier, postage 1d

The 1d franking for a military concessionary rate was established 1795. To use this rate, the letter required endorsements and an officer's countersignature. The privileged 1d rate at the time of posting, and an additional 2d to be collected from the recipient. The 2d rate applied for letters sent by packet ships. If sent by a private ship, the rate was 4d. The soldiers' letters were not subjected to the port charge, only the gratitude to the ship.

In February 1861 the surcharge on overseas letter was discontinued.
From February 1900 the charge was terminated.

Soldier's Letter from Lines Drift 15th October 1855 at the Eastern Frontier. Line Drift is located sixty miles' (96.56 kilometres) east of Grahamstown. It was sent by Pte Wm Moores No 1758, of the 6th Royal Regt. and has the required officer's countersignature. The letter is franked with a 1d deep brick-red Triangular, blued paper (SG 1a). On the front the charged "4" in manuscript on receipt as it was carried by a private ship.



On the reverse a Grahams-Town oval and an unlined Cape Town date stamp, and arrival stamps in Britain and Manchester DE 25 1855.

Total travel time of 61 days

1856

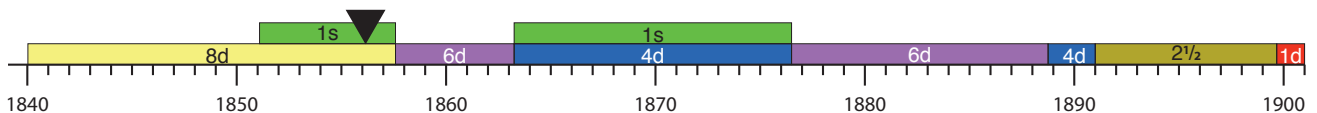
Ship letter to Scotland, inland & port charges plus 8d to pay

Ship letter from Richmond to Stirling (Scotland) 1856 with a pair of 4d blue triangular and an 8d handstamp to pay. This business letter (concerning wool) is pre-paid with 4d inland rate and the 4d Port Charge. The stamps have a triangular obliterator. On the back an array of full clear postmarks shows the travel of the letter; Richmond (JA 10) to Cape Town (JA 15) to be continued to Plymouth (MR 17) with "Ship Letter Plymouth" stamp. Arrival stamps at Plymouth (MR 17) and finally at Sterling (MR19).



Richmond (JA 10) – Cape Town (JA 15): 5 days
Cape Town (JA 15) – Plymouth (MR 17): 61 days
Plymouth (MR 17) – Sterling (MR19): 2 days

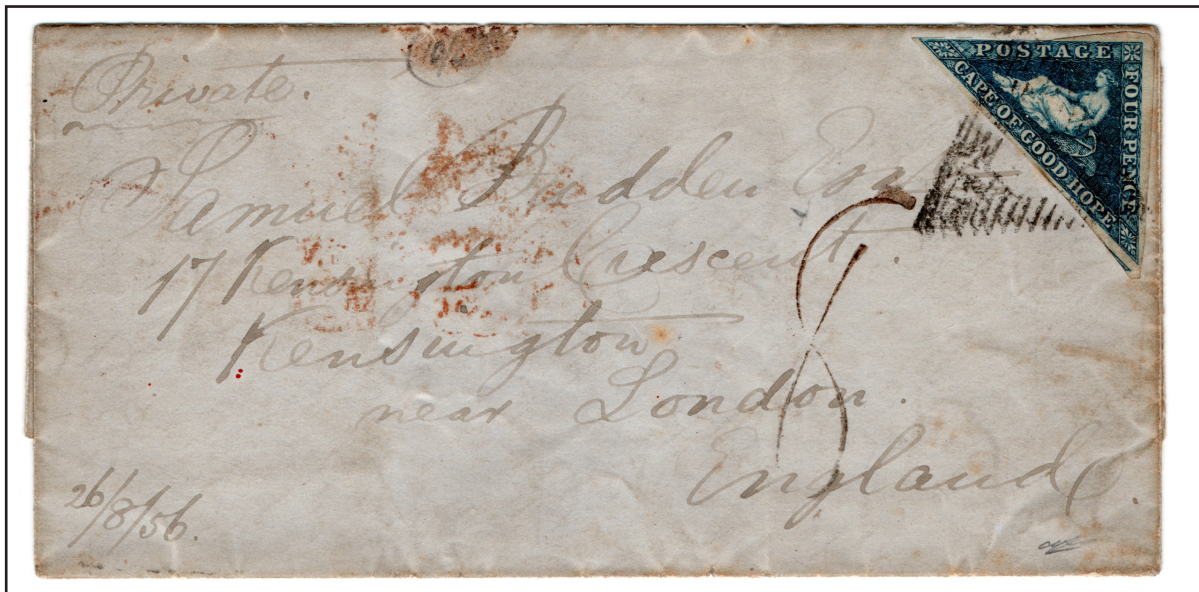
Total 68 days



1856

Private Ship Letter, postage 4d + 8d

Private ship letter from Cape Town to London 1856. Franked with a 4d deep blue triangle (SG6).

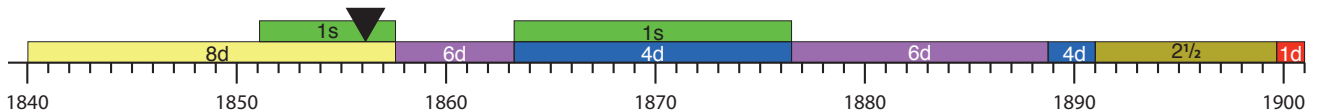


The 4d port charge was prepaid, and manuscript "8" in black for postage still due. The stamp is cancelled by a triangular obliterator (STO 1).



On the reverse Cape Town unlined date stamp (AU 27) type UC2 and arrival stamps; Liverpool Ship Letter boxed date stamp (NO 3).

68 days.



1859

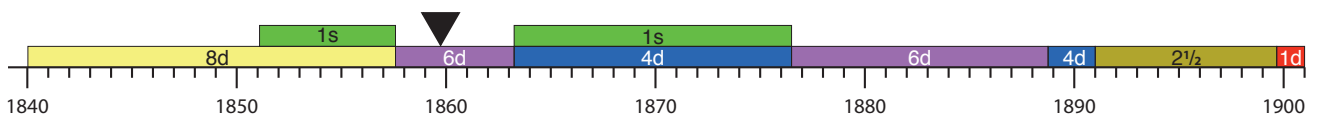
In 1857 a new postage of 6d with all included and the port charge terminated

With the mail prepaid in the Cape Colony most of postage was credit to the ship and to Britain. The amount was marked in red on the letter often in manuscript this is referred to Accountancy Marks. They were shorthand notations for journal entry instructions to record amounts owing to or amounts owing from other postal entities.

A letter sent from Cape Town to London per RMS Celt (of the Union Steamship Co) in 1859. The letter travelled to Sheffield UK via Devonport (26 SP) and London (SP 27). Franked with a 6d deep rose-lilac (SG 7b) triangular paying the mail steamer rate. This was Celt's fifth return voyage departing Cape Town on the 21st August and arriving in Devonport on the 26th September.

On the front "5" in red crayon being the 5d portion of postage to be credited to the UK.

No postmarks on the reverse.



1863

Increased rate for Packet Letter, 1/-

In 1860 the cost for oversea mail between the Cape colony and the UK was running a deficiency. The losses were 9d on each letter which was not sustainable and the postage for packet letter was increased to 1/- of the 1st of April 1863.

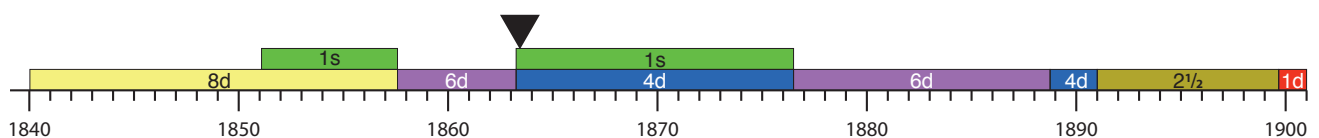


A mourning letter sent from Cape Town 6th of June 1863 with the new rate 1/- for mail steamer (packet) rate to Chelmsford in Essex. Endorsed "Paid" at top. On the front "11" in red crayon being the 11d portion of postage to be credited to the UK.



Cape Town unlined date stamp on reverse, London PAID JY 22 on front. Arriving in Chelmsford the 22nd of July.

Total time of 46 days.



1864

Private ship mail, Diamond Line, postage 4d

From the 1st of April 1863 the postage for letters sent by a private ship were set to 4d. The letters had to be specially marked “by Private Ship” or with the name of the vessel. On the letter an accountancy mark of “2” was in manuscript or a stamp crediting 2d to the UK out of the 4d paid.



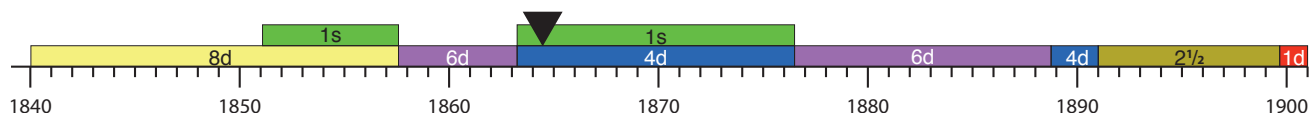
Letter from Port Elizabeth to England 1864 endorsed “per Eastern Province Steamer” private ship (ship mail). Franked De La Rue 4d deep blue triangle (SG 19) cancelled with the small triangular defacer. London PAID JY 31 struck in red on front. Accountancy mark “2” crediting 2d to the UK out of the 4d paid.



Pencil notation on reverse “The letter which was inside was dated 20 June 1864.” Assuming mailing at Port Elizabeth on that day, the letter was carried on the very first sailing of the Diamond Line leaving Port Elizabeth on 20 June 1864 and arriving Falmouth on 30 July. Manchester backstamp AU 1.

The Diamond Line service was inaugurated on May 25, 1864, on arrival of the SS Eastern Province. By the middle of 1866 only three ships remained in service. The line ceased operations in 1867, an extremely short period of only 2½ years.

Total time of 42 days.



1865

Consignee's Mail per Diamond Line

Letter carried by on a ship on behalf of the ship owner, charters, or consignees. They did not need to pay any postage (effective from 1854) of their letters up to 6oz, port to port. However, letters passing the ports of the Cape colony were subjected to the port charge (as long as it was in use). Also, letter that should continue in the colony or in the UK needed a postage for the inland route.



The letter sheet was written on embossed letter paper of Maynard, Buchanan & Co, Port Elizabeth. Endorsed pp S Kaffraria" to John Jeffrey & Co, Brewers of ale, in Scotland. Written 25th August 1865, the order for liquor was handed to the merchant's correspondent in London on 6th October who as required applied a GB 1d franking (London duplex 73 OC 6) for onward posting to the final destination. Arrival date stamp Edinburgh OC 9 on the reverse.



The letter was carried per steamer Kaffraria of the Diamond Line. These arrangements were available because the Diamond Line inaugurated shipping from Algoa Bay, the first service by the ss Eastern Province that arrived in Port Elizabeth May 25th, 1864. The Maynard, Buchanan & Co traded as merchants in Port Elizabeth from 1861 to 1872, obtaining a liquor license in 1863. Illustration in Trotter page 214.

1869

The rectangle stamps introduced 1864, packet letter, postage 1/-

Letter (packet rate) carried by the Union Line “pr M. St Saxon” 1869 from Cape Town to London.



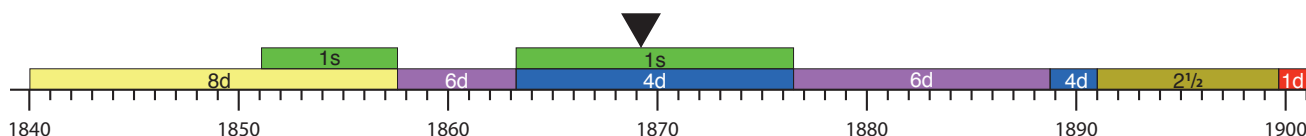
Franked 1/- rectangular Hope Seated, tied by departure Duplex Cancellor MR 19 / BONC 1 and alongside in red, the London PAID cds 17 AP. No accountancy marks on the letter but the payment from Cape to the UK was still in effect.



On the reverse arrival stamp “AP 17 1869”.

On her maiden voyage she left Plymouth on the 9th of May 1863 and set up a new record by arriving in Cape Town 31 days later. In the following month Saxon lost the Cape Record to her sister ship, Roman, but regained it once more in 1865. After leaving Plymouth on the 11th of March, she reached Cape Town in 28 days 12 hours and this time the Saxon’s new record stood until May 1869. The 1868 contract required the Union Line to provide fortnightly sailings, each voyage to take no more than 31 days.

Sailing time for this letter 29 days.



1880

A uniform rate of 6d

First of July 1876 the Packet and Ship rates become the same at 6d. From this date it was no difference between Packet and Ship rates and subsequent changes applied both types of vessels.

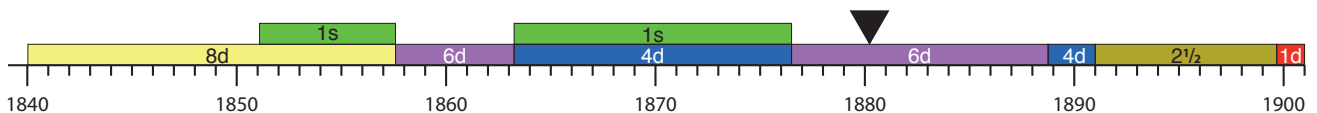


Letter from Robben Island 1880 to England, franked at 6d by 1879 3d on 4d blue horizontal pair, tied by BONC '158' with confirmatory backstamp (Putzel and Visser 2a). The face with London arrival cds (15 AP) in red at lower left.



On the reverse a circular despatched date stamp from Robben Island on MR 22, and a transit circular despatched date stamp from Cape Town the same day.

Ship time 24 days.



1888

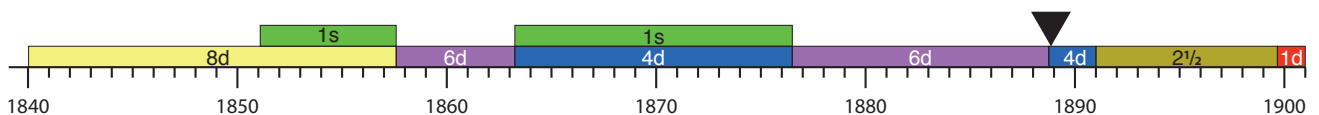
Registered letter with a 4d postage to the UK

A letter from Kalk-Bay NO 8 1888 to London. The letter is franked with a 4d paying postage and in addition a 2x2d = 4d paying the registration. With an obliterator BONC 447 with a dispatch Kalk-Bay circular date stamp. On the front an arrival date stamp Hackney Wick Rd 260, DE 4 88, and the delivery in London on December the 7th.



On the reverse a circular Registered Letter date stamp (RL 7) from Cape Town 8 NO. An oval Registered Letter date stamp on arrival 4 DE.

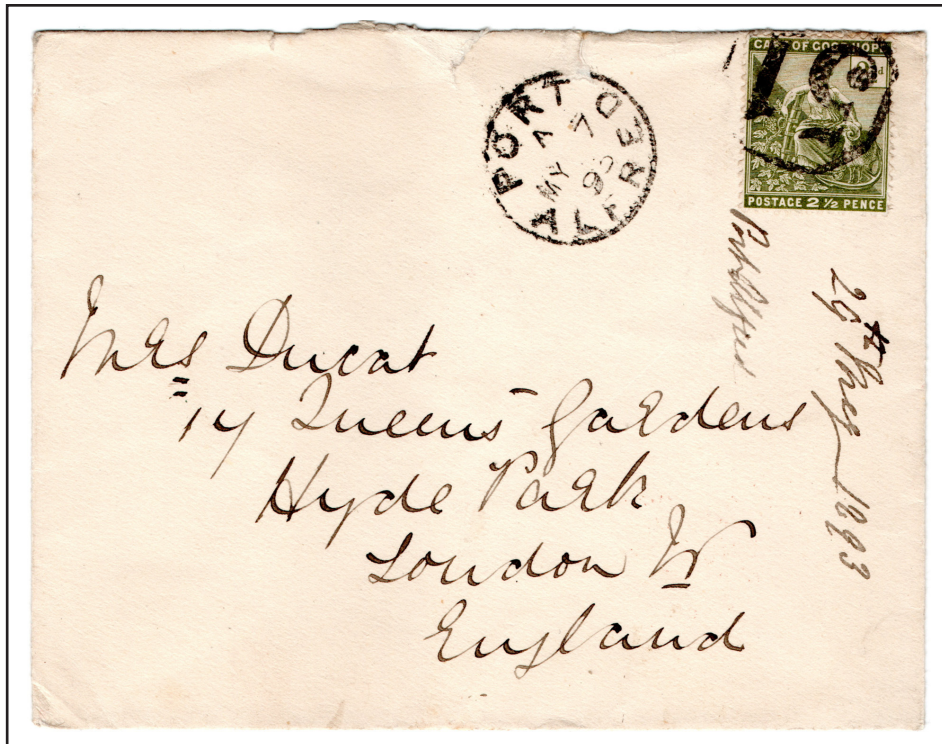
Total time of 30 days



1893

A uniform rate of 2½d, but not because of the UPU

The reduction to a 2½d postage was introduced from the 1st of January 1891, when Britain removed the 1½d Maritime Surcharge. The Cape Colony joined the Universal Postal Union (UPU) as a member on the 1st of January 1895, which required the rate to be 2½d for foreign destinations. Note, Great Britain joined the UPU on the 1st of July 1875, and a oversea letter from Britain to another UPU country became 2½d.

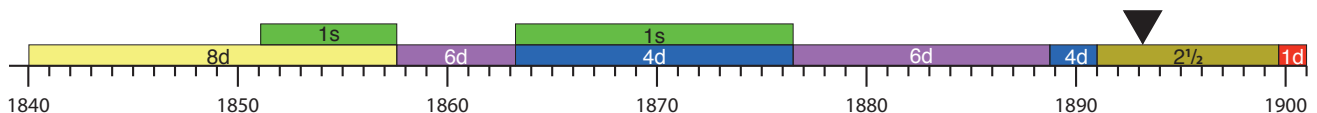


Letter to England 1893 franked by 2½d sage-green, tied by octagonal 51 cancel and a Port Alfred date stamp MY 7.



Backstamped at Paddington W. with an arrival date stamp MY 23 in red.

16 days.



1900

On the 1st of September 1899, the imperial penny post was introduced

Envelope from Tylden CGH (cds MR 28 00) to England franked with a single Table Bay 1d. The letter reached Dover on 28th of April and its destination the next day.



The letter was loaded to the ship Union-Castle liner “Mexican” which left Table Bay on the 4th of April 1900 for Southampton. At 2am on the 5th of April she was sunk by collision with the English transport “Winkfield” in fog approximately 80 miles out. The saved letter was stamped in red of the two-line “RECOVERED FROM WRECK OF MEXICAN” cachet.



The “imperial penny” lasted until the 3rd of June 1918.

