

A FOLLOW UP TO SOUTH AFRICA: PART 2

By Mike Dovey

Previous articles in July and August of *GSM* by Mike Dovey of the TPO & Seapost Society examined unique postmarks, postage rates and mail routes used to send mail between South Africa and Britain from 1850 to the end of the 19th century. However, one particular paquebot index letter was missing from his report, as it had never actually been recorded as being seen before, that is until one *GSM* reader got in touch. Thanks to that reader, maritime postal history takes a step forward, but it does leave one big question.

The whole idea of articles in a magazine is not just to inform the reader about a particular subject, but to maybe provoke someone into not just reading an article but realising that they have something, as yet, not recorded in any of the books on the subject, and then contacting either the magazine or the author to fill the gap in the knowledge of the subject. Well, here is a perfect case of just that. I am sure that the editor of *Gibbons Stamp Monthly* would be very pleased to know that his magazine has taken maritime postal history a step forward.

For well over 60 years plus there has been a list of index letters assigned to various Union and Union Castle Lines vessels for servicing mail while on board such RMS ships, and to that end, the list comprised letters A to N but with one missing letter – 'T'. And so it came to pass.

Lost and found

Shown in *Figure 1* we have a superb Union Castle envelope with Cape of Good Hope stamps and three Ocean Post Office cancels, all with the index letter 'T', which fills the gaps in the age old listing of Index letters. On arrival at Southampton on the 7 December the envelope was cancelled with an H215 paquebot/packet letter mark; however, the big, big, and even bigger question is, which ship carried and deposited the letter at Southampton?

Which ship used it?

All other sailings into Southampton are either too early or too late, and so there are only three contenders as to who used the index 'T' on board the ship. These are the *Norham Castle*, the *Dunottar Castle* and the *Moor*, all of these three arrived into Southampton on the 7 December 1900 (*Fig 2*).

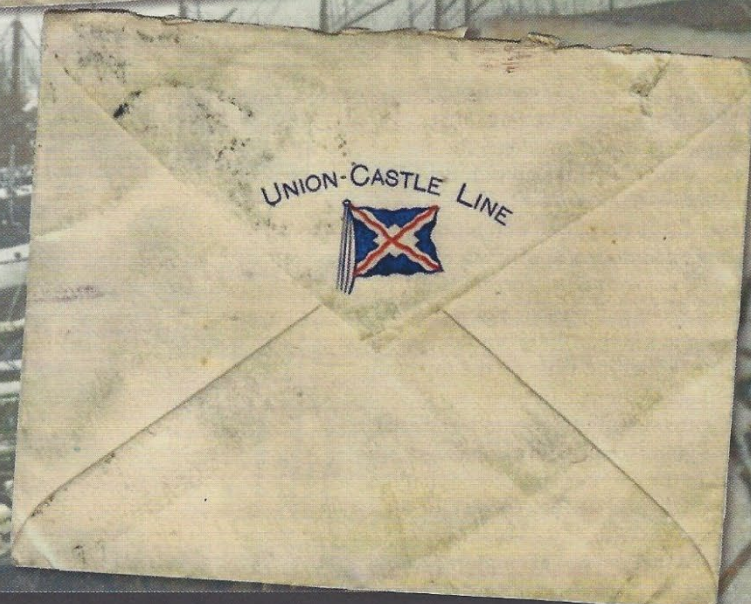


Fig 1 The front and back of a Union Castle Line envelope, dated December 7 1900, which has taken over 120 years to be recognised and properly recorded. Sent in by Wilf Vevers, after reading the previous articles in *GSM*, it provides proof that index letter 'T' was used - but onboard which ship?

1 Norham Castle:

While it arrived on the day it already had used index 'M' (1895–1898) and was using index 'F' (1894–1901), the index 'T' was used on the day of the docking, which is irregular, as usually the Ocean Post Office mark is applied during the voyage.

2 Dunottar Castle:

Again, arrived on the day and was using both index 'B' (1893–1904) and index 'M' (1900–1901 presumably passed over from the *Norham Castle*) and again, by using the Ocean Post Office so late is an irregular usage, and did the ship really need a third index when it had only just taken onboard index 'M'?

3 Moor:

Docked outside of the port in Southampton on the evening of the 2 December and passengers and mail were tendered off to catch the mail train to London. Therefore, any mail tendered off the ship would have been date stamped the 3 or 4 December (Fig 3).

The ship then sailed onwards to London, was turned around in probably a record time, and was back in Southampton on the 7 December. This one day voyage would explain why the Ocean Post Office cancel is dated the 7 December, the same as the paquebot mark at Southampton. However, it does not explain the use of Cape of Good Hope stamps on a one day voyage from London to Southampton, and also, the ship already had the index 'J', and again, why the need for a second index especially as the vessel was sold to Royal Mail Line a few months later in 1901 and renamed as the *La Plata*, and so why would the ship be given a new index letter for the sake of a few weeks?

Onward bound

The envelope was then forwarded onwards by the RMS *Galician* which sailed from Southampton on the 22 December and arrived at St Helena on the 7 January 1901 – there is no dispute over this leg of the journey (Fig 4).

One would wonder why a letter would travel from Capetown to Southampton and all the way back to St Helena, and not just go from Capetown to St Helena, a much shorter voyage. The answer is that only certain ships on particular voyages made the stops at Ascension and St Helena as they had time schedules to adhere to.

The envelope itself was emailed to us by Wilf Vevers, who, on reading the article in the *GSM*, contacted us stating that he had the Index 'T'. However, all of this is pure conjecture as to which ship is

UNION-CASTLE LINE.—SOUTH AFRICAN ROYAL MAIL SERVICE.—LONDON and SOUTHAMPTON to CAPE COLONY, NATAL, DELAGOA BAY, BEIRA, and MAURITIUS.

Steamers.	Via.	London.	Southampton.
*MOOR	Teneriffe	Dec. 6	Dec. 7
*ANTALLON CASTLE	Madeira	—	Dec. 8
*DUNOTTAR CASTLE	Madeira	—	Dec. 16
*HEARTH CASTLE	Las Palmas	Dec. 14	Dec. 15
*SWEDEW HALL	Las Palmas	—	Dec. 19
*BRITON	Madeira	—	Dec. 22
*GALICIAN	Teneriffe	Dec. 21	Dec. 22

*Royal Mail Steamer. †Intermediate Steamer. x To Delagoa Bay. ‡Mauritius Steamer. a Calling at St. Helena. Union-Castle Special Express Trains leave Waterloo for Southampton every Saturday. Apply to Donald Currie and Co., Managers, 3, Fenchurch-st., E.C.

Times Sailings from 7 December 1900

The Union-Castle Line s. **PEMBROKE CASTLE**, from Table Bay, left Las Palmas at 6 p.m. on Thursday, and is due in London about 6 a.m. on Thursday next. The **DOUNE CASTLE** left Natal for London, via Teneriffe, at 7 p.m. on Wednesday. The **DUNOTTAR CASTLE**, from Cape Town, arrived at Southampton at 7 p.m. yesterday. The **NORHAM CASTLE**, from Table Bay, arrived at Southampton at 5.30 p.m. yesterday.

Times Sailings from 8 December 1900

The **MOOR** arrived at Southampton from Table Bay, South Africa, on the 2 December 1900, as this *Times* Sailing notice of 3 December 1900 stated

Fig 2 Sections taken from the *Times Sailings* which show that the RMS *Dunottar Castle*, *Norham Castle* and SS *Moor* arrived on the 7 December and that *Galician* was due to sail on the 22

All we need now is a confirmation so that we can indeed allot a ship to the letter instead of tossing a trio into the air in the hope that one will come up trumps

Fig 3 The *Moor* arrived at Southampton from Table Bay, South Africa, on the 2 December 1900, as this *Times* Sailing notice of 3 December 1900 stated

The Union-Castle Line s. **SAXON**, from Southampton and Cape ports, arrived at Natal on Thursday afternoon. The **RAGLAN CASTLE**, from Southampton, left Teneriffe for Cape Town, via St. Helena, at 8 a.m. on Saturday. The **MOOR** left Southampton (Hurst Castle) for Cape Town, via Madeira, at 6.30 p.m. on Saturday. The **MOOR**, from Table Bay, arrived at Southampton (Hurst Castle) at 8.10 p.m. yesterday.

*GALICIAN	Teneriffe	Dec. 21	Dec. 22
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*Royal Mail Steamer. †Intermediate Steamer. x To Delagoa Bay. ‡Mauritius Steamer. a Calling at St. Helena.

Fig 4 An extract taken from the *Times Sailings* showing the scheduled route RMS *Galician* took from Southampton on 22 December to St Helena

the correct one, and so we need another example of the index 'T', if at all possible, on a very nice PPC of the ship.

Confirmation needed

We are deeply indebted to Wilf for coming up with what is the missing letter in the listing and showing off a truly superb envelope. All we need now is a confirmation so that we can indeed allot a ship to the letter instead of tossing a trio into the air in the hope that one will come up trumps. And all this coming out of one article in the magazine that has highlighted something totally new and not recognised for 120 years.

Acknowledgments
Our sincere thanks to the Times Digital Archive for being able to delve into all of their superb information.

Base image credit: Pierre-Paul Pantalacci, Postcards of old Port of Marseille c1895