

The TPO and Seapost Society Celebrates its 75th Anniversary

This special feature, contributed by members of the TPO and Seapost Society, covers just a few of the subjects which feature in its Journal: paquebot marks, pleasure steamers, ship and packet letters, 'AM' postmarks and the Chinese Travelling Post Office.

The TPO and Seapost Society celebrates its 75th Anniversary on 6 January 2013, which is also the 175th Anniversary of the first railway Travelling Post Office in Great Britain. From the start, the Society considered the marks and handling processes of mail posted and sorted 'while on the move' by rail, motor vehicles or at sea. During the period that the Society has grown to its present worldwide complement of some 200 members, the *TPO Journal*, first published in 1947, has become the repository of record for initial sightings of covers bearing the special marks applied in mobile sorting offices. For postal historians, the articles have recorded many of the exciting developments in surface mail transportation since the formation of the UPU in 1875. Early contributors to the *TPO Journal* have gone on to produce many of today's rail and maritime reference books that are indispensable to the modern postal historian.

Paquebot Marks

by Mike Dovey

At the Lausanne Universal Postal Union (UPU) convention of 1892 procedures were laid down for dealing with letters which had been written on board ship and were then landed at a foreign port.

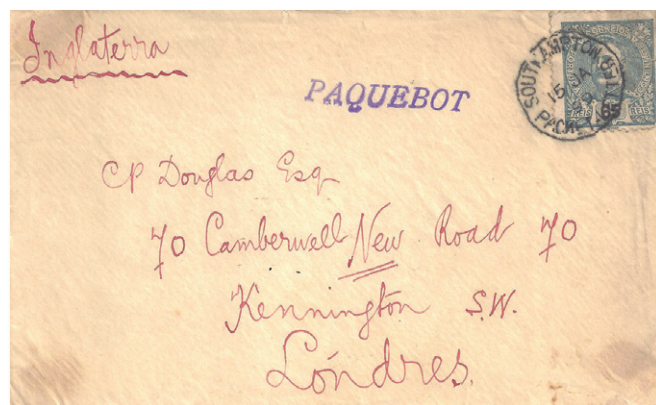
Instead of requiring a seaman to rush off to the local post office to buy stamps on landing, it would be better if, while on the high seas, a vessel could be considered as the sovereign territory of the country to which it was registered, and then stamps of that country could be used on letters posted in the ship's mailbox. On arrival at the next port the seaman would merely bag the letters and take them ready-stamped to the post office. There, a 'paquebot' mark would be applied to the envelopes to show that they were indeed posted on the high seas. This new procedure was introduced worldwide on the 1 January 1894 and eagerly adopted by the British and French with an 'omnibus' design being issued in both countries and their colonies (Figs 1 and 2).

By around 1900 use of picture postcards was increasing rapidly, so that by 1910 they were the most popular means of communication as they were very cheap to buy and post. Shipping lines quickly realised the advertising advantage of displaying pictures of their ships and soon every ship had a stock of cards for sale. An increasing number were used by passengers and posted on board, so receiving paquebot marks from ports around the world. Between 1900 and

Fig 1 Letter landed at Le Havre, France, H410 dated March 1894



Fig 2 Letter landed at Southampton H22 & H214 for London dated January 1899



1914 the vast majority of paquebot marks will be found on such postcards making it an attractive area for maritime postal history collectors (Figs 3 and 4).

Before 1939 the vast majority of paquebot marks were serviced on either postcards or privately written letters. However, commercial mail may also be found bearing such marks demonstrating interesting mail routings (Figs 5 and 6).

In the mid-1930s a number of collectors, both in Britain and the USA, realised they could write to a ship to request a posting showing the ship's name. With luck the ship would hand the mail over at a required port. This led to what is now called the philatelic cover which plays a very important role in

the collection of paquebot covers, while also documenting ships' travels and marks of most of the world's ports (Figs 7 and 8).

Once collectors found they could access shipping lines, it became possible to collect entire fleets of vessels as well as paquebot marks, leading to collections of covers for such lines as Cunard, Blue Star Line, Royal Mail Steam Packet, P & O (Peninsular & Orient), Union Castle Line and even cargo lines such as Blue Funnel Line and Bank Line (Figs 9 and 10).

The paquebot mark reference numbers shown are from the 4th edition of *Paquebot Cancellations of the World* by Mike Dovey and Keith Morris. (The images on this page are reduced in size to 60 per cent).

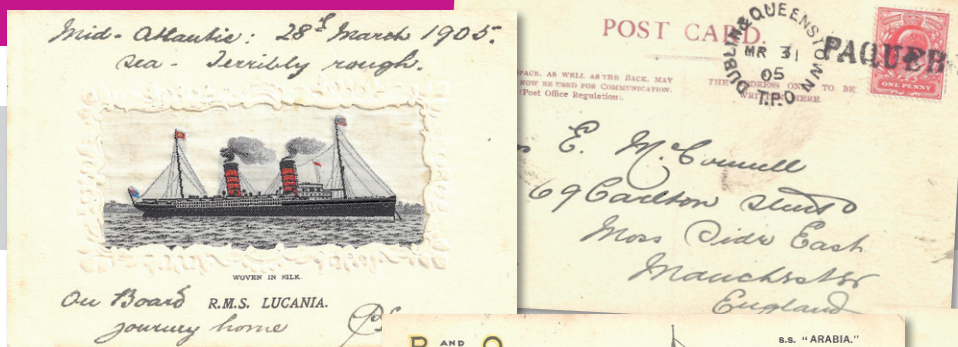
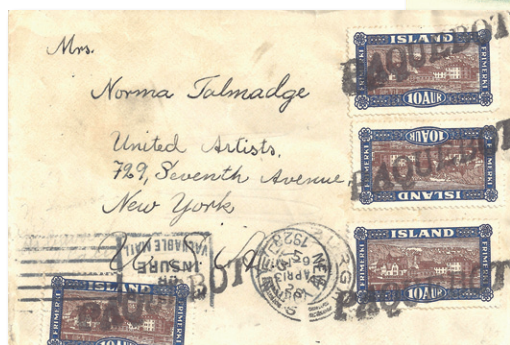
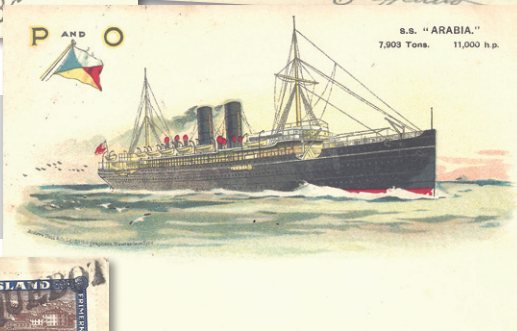
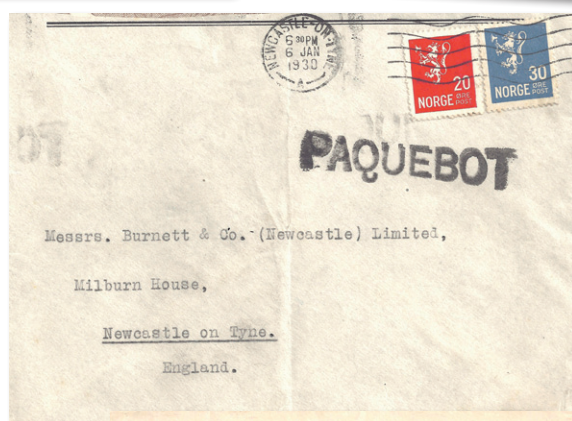


Fig 3 Silk postcard, SS Lucania, Cunard Line, with a paquebot mark H385 applied on the Dublin & Queenstown Travelling Post Office (TPO)

Fig 4 Postcard, SS Arabia, P & O Line, with a Port Said paquebot mark H2858



Left: Fig 5 Letter from Iceland landed at Edinburgh H278 and destined for New York



Left: Fig 6 Letter from Norway landed at Newcastle, H157



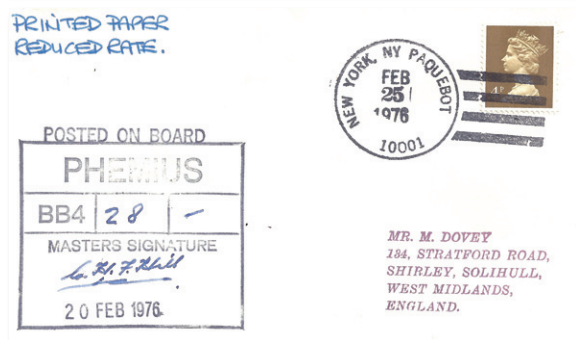
Left: Fig 7 Philatelic cover from SS Camito, Elders & Fyffes, with a Kingston, Jamaica, mark H2402



Right: Fig 8 Philatelic cover from SS Andalusia Star, Blue Star Line, with a Lisbon, Portugal mark H1217



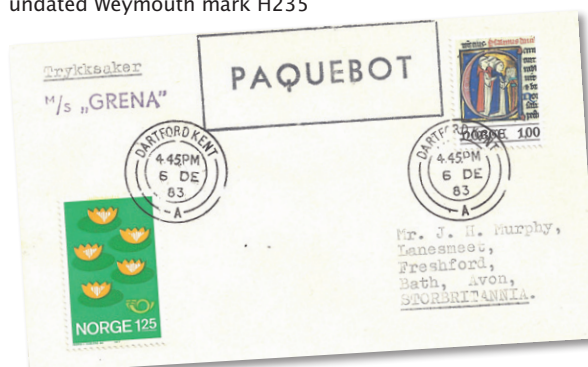
Right: Fig 10 Letter from MV Fenbank, Bank Line, with a Singapore mark H3398



Above: Fig 9 Letter from MV Phenius, Blue Funnel Line, with a New York mark H2064



Left: Letter posted on board SS Falaise, British Rail Ferry, with an undated Weymouth mark H235



Left: Letter posted on MS Grena with a boxed Dartford, Kent mark H202

Pleasure Steamers

by Geoff Ellerton and Crawford Alexander

Arrangements for handling shipboard mail were not confined to vessels on the high seas. Postal facilities existed on river and lake boats where water provided a more convenient link than either road or rail between remote communities. River steamers were often the only links in mountainous or jungle regions, or to offshore islands. Mails handled by these services bear their own interesting cancellation marks.

Examples illustrated show a letter posted via a postal agency on board a steamer on the Berbice River in Guyana in 1976 (Fig 1) and a ship post operating between Konstanz (Switzerland) and Bregenz (Austria) in 1905 (Fig 2). Lake Constance is now bordered by Germany, Austria and Switzerland, and ship posts have been operated at various times by the postal authorities of all three countries, as well as three previously autonomous German states.

The postcard shown (Fig 3) was produced by David MacBrayne Ltd, who provided a passenger steamer and ferry service on the Firth of Clyde and to the many Scottish west coast islands. For many years a floating post office operated on four MacBrayne ships to provide the Greenock and Ardrishaig packet service.

Ships and boats on inland or inshore waters were not used solely for passenger traffic and trade between communities. The expansion of the railway system in Britain in the Victorian era popularised cheap tourist excursions from industrial towns to the countryside and seaside. 'All aboard' was the watch cry not just for the train but also for the boat, and pleasure steamers offering day trippers or holidaymakers a short sail on the river, lake, loch, along the coast or even just 'round the bay'. Postcards were hugely popular souvenirs bought to send to friends, and ship-owners were quick to seize the opportunity to promote their sailings by using rubber stamped cachets to record that the cards were 'posted on board' or simply to show the ship's name. Examples are known from as early as 1878 and can still be obtained today.

Although the years before the First World War saw the heyday of both the excursion steamer and the picture postcard, fewer than 70 different steamer cachets pre-1914 have been recorded to date, and in some cases only a single example is known. RMS *Lord of the Isles* operated services on the Firth of Clyde, including one linking to a trip on the small SS *Fairy Queen* on the fresh water Loch Eck. Cards with both cachets together are rare (Fig 4). *La Marguerite* was Britain's largest excursion paddle steamer. It started life on the Thames but soon moved to the very popular Liverpool to North Wales service. Various cachets are known (Figs 5 and 6) but the latter postcard shows the last recorded use before the ship took on its wartime role carrying troops across the Channel (cards cropped and reduced).

The inter-war years, 1919-1939, saw a gradual decline in excursion steamer traffic in Britain, and fewer than 40 different cachets are recorded from this period. The post-war years saw some resurgence, notably of Channel day cruises from Thames ports in the 1950s and on the Clyde in the 1960s. Cachets from both these periods are less hard



Fig 1 'T.P.A B'CE RIV. STR / GUYANA'



Fig 2 'KONSTANZ- BREGENZ'



Above: Fig 5 'POSTED ON / LA MARGUERITE' and postmarked 'MENAI BRIDGE S. O. / ANGLESEY' in 1908

Right: Fig 6 'POSTED ON / LA MARGUERITE' and postmarked 'LLANDUDNO 10 SEP 14'

Left: Fig 3 'GK. & ARDRISHAIG PACKET / COLUMBA' dated 1911

Below: Fig 4 'RMS LORD OF THE ISLES' and 'S.S. FAIRY QUEEN' ship cachets



Left: Fig 7 'AT SEA / m.v. ROYAL SOVEREIGN' and scarcer boxed 'M/V. ROYAL SOVEREIGN' cachets on a postcard probably sent under cover as a memento in 1963



Above and left: Fig 8 Examples of modern steamer cachets

to find. Whilst some 600 different cachets are known from 1945 to date, these are generally not from pleasure steamers but from ferry services between British ports or islands. They are often simply the ship's official stamp or a route marking applied by favour, for the benefit of future maritime postal historians (Fig 7)!

It is still possible to get current steamer cachets and the paddle steamer *Waverley* and her sister ship *MV Balmoral* have post boxes on board. These two vessels sail from the Firth of Clyde, Bristol Channel, South Coast and Thames at different times of the year and often produce attractive cards or covers with regular or one-off commemorative cachets (Fig 8).

An attractive philatelic cover shows a *Balmoral* cachet tying a short-lived *Balmoral* label. The privately produced Steep Holm stamp is also tied and the cover has been carried on the West Somerset Railway, which runs from Minehead to Bishops Lydeard near



Fig 9 'POSTED ABOARD BALMORAL' and postmarked Steep Holm and Watchet in 1987

Taunton, so the cover is a modern version of the traditional linkage of sea and rail excursions (Fig 9). A good reference for such cachets is *British Pleasure Steamer Cachets* by Crawford Alexander, Mike Dovey and Geoff Ellerton, published by the TPO & Seapost Society.

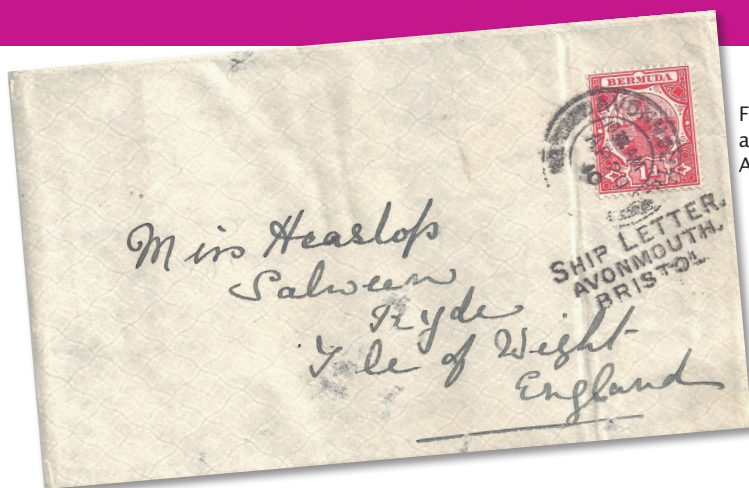


Fig 1 The Bermuda 1d. stamp is cancelled by a double ring Avonmouth canceller dated 20 April 1910

Below: Fig 2 Marks on the back of a letter from Alnwick, Canada: 'MONTREAL / JU / 1855 / L.C.'; 'STEAMBOAT LETTER - MONTREAL / JU 5 1855 / 3'; 'CONVEYED BY / UNITED STATES / PACKET' (Rob. M5); 'PKT LETTER / LIVERPOOL / 24 JUL / B 1855 O' (Rob. P9)



Fig 3 The French sea post office mark 'BUENOS AYRES A BORDEAUX 2° / 8 OCT 02 / L.K.No.2' on the top centre of this postal card from Brazil to Germany indicates that it was sorted on board the French Seapost 'Line K' on route to Bordeaux. The card also bears strikes of double-ring Travelling Post Office mark 'RIO-CLARO/ 7 OUT 1902 / (AMBe.S.PAULO)' and TPO double-ring 'TREM - AMBULANTE / 7 OUT/ 3a.T'



(All images on these two pages are reduced)

Ship and Packet Letters

by Julian H Jones

The 'ship letter' mark was first used in the 18th century to indicate where a letter was first landed, to help the Post Office calculate the postage due for the distance between the port and its destination and is usually associated with unstamped letters of that period. However, similar marks were used in the 20th century in place of a paquebot mark as this example (Fig 1) shows.

While many ships carried mail, they were not usually under contract to do so. However, the postal authorities of many countries also organised ships to carry mail on a regular basis. These become known as 'packets', the famous 'Falmouth Packet' being an early example. By the middle of the 19th century there was an extensive network of shipping lines operating across the North Atlantic between the USA and respectively Great Britain, France and Germany. These were also known as packets and gave rise in Britain to packet marks, such as those applied in Liverpool to letters carried by Cunard, Allan and Collins line ships between 1840 and 1867.

This cover (Fig 2) sent from Canada via New York and Liverpool to South Molton, Devon, in 1855 illustrates the wealth of information conveyed by the packet and steamer marks which lead to an understanding of how this letter was routed along its journey.

Many lines carried post office sorters on board to speed the sorting of mail for quicker despatch on landing. The French authorities introduced special handstamps early on to cancel letters handled during on-board sorting. Such marks were also used from 1893 by German and US lines operating on the north Atlantic. In some cases these sea



Fig 4 Letter sorted on the TPO from London to Holyhead to cross via the Holyhead to Kingstown packet to Ireland and travel by rail to Queenstown to be loaded on a liner bound for New York

post offices, as they become known, were jointly operated by postal clerks of more than one country. France, Germany and Britain all operated joint sea post offices with the USA at some period up to 1939. The French operations also ranged much more widely than just the north Atlantic (Fig 3).

The railways played a major part in speeding mails to the points of embarkation and from the end of the voyage to the final destination. Many letters landed for example at Le Havre in France show TPO sorting marks applied on their way to Paris.

This is further illustrated by this letter from England to Nebraska via Queenstown and New York (Fig 4).

'AM' (After Midnight) postmarks used on GB Travelling Post Offices

by Rick Martin

After 1947, and prior to 1953, it was possible to obtain first day covers with the stamp(s) postmarked with the date of the day before the official issue date, for two reasons:

1. New stamp issues could be purchased in London at midnight at the all-night post offices in Trafalgar Square and in the King Edward Office in the City; the covers were then posted into the six railway Travelling Post Offices (TPOs) running into London in the early morning of the date of issue.
2. The datestamps used on the TPOs carried the date of departure and this was not changed after midnight.

Using a good knowledge of the roads out of London and a fast motor car (no 60m.p.h. [100k.p.h.] speed limits in the late 1950s or early 1960s!), several railway stations could be reached where covers with the new issue stamps could be posted into a TPO travelling towards the capital. In January 1953 this situation was brought to the attention of postal officials. A survey was carried out and it was found that the following TPOs could be reached by train or car and letters posted on board:

Travelling Post Office	Railway Station
Great Western TPO Up	Reading or Slough
East Anglian TPO Up	Colchester, Chelmsford or Romford
South Eastern TPO Up	East Croydon
South Western TPO Up	Woking, Weybridge, Walton on Thames or Surbiton
Up Special TPO	Rugby
North Eastern TPO UP	Peterborough

Consideration was given to changing the datestamp after midnight but it was realised that this could cause confusion, especially on documents. It was therefore decided to use 'AM' (After Midnight) in the datestamps. Apparently only the East Anglian TPO datestamp was unsuitable for the insertion of an 'AM' slug and a new stamp was made at a cost of £3. Later, collectors also found that they could buy new issue stamps at the Birmingham all night telegraph office and additional datestamps became necessary for the TPOs with stops that could be reached from Birmingham. The only time an 'AM' datestamp was needed in Scotland was September 1964 when special arrangements were made in connection with the issue of the Forth Road Bridge stamps. Theoretically, the 'AM' datestamp should only be used on the new issue stamp, the normal datestamp being used on any other stamp on the cover; however, this rarely happened due to pressure of work. With the development of the Motorway network from 1959, more TPOs could be reached from London, until it was possible to obtain 'AM' postmarks from all the TPOs running in England and Wales.



Fig 1 Crewe – Cardiff TPO cover posted at Abergavenny



Fig 2 East Anglian TPO Down cover posted at Ipswich

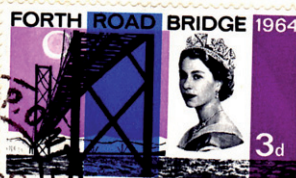
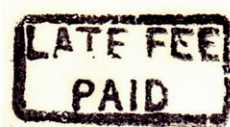


Fig 3 Great Western TPO Up cover posted at Didcot Parkway

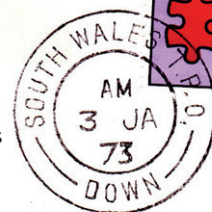


Fig 4 Midland TPO Going South cover posted at Birmingham New Street station

Below: North Eastern TPO Night Down, (London, Newcastle upon Tyne and Edinburgh) posted at Newcastle upon Tyne. The index 'E' indicates the postmark was applied in the Edinburgh Section coach of the TPO



Left: South Wales Down TPO from London to Swansea via Reading. The first use of this mark was on a first day cover on 3 January 1973. It was also used on 10 May 1988 and 30 September 1988



'AM' datestamps were prepared at the TPO Section of the General Post Office's London Central Transport and sent to the officer in charge of each TPO with a written instruction, such as this for the Liverpool and Manchester Railway issue in March 1980:

'NEW STAMP ISSUE.

The accompanying date stamp AM 12 MR 1980 is for use as detailed in TPO order..... and must not be used for any other purpose.

The date stamp should be returned to TPO Section on the morning of 12 MR 1980

For Manager
TPO Section.'

Some 48 'AM' TPO postmarks were recorded by the late Robin Stubbs, who had meticulously recorded all the TPO postmarks used between 1962 and 2004. However, on 21 October 1985 the Trafalgar Square Office ceased 24-hour opening and so the need for the special handstamps ended.

Figs 1 to 4 are some examples of the 'AM' postmark used on First day Covers posted into the respective TPOs while at an intermediate station.

More information about GB TPOs may be found in: *Travelling Post Offices of Great Britain & Ireland* by H Wilson, Derby 1996, and *TPO Postmarks of Great Britain 1962–1990* by RM Stubbs and GP Roberts, TPO & Seapost Society 1991.

Chinese Travelling Post Offices

by E Keith Lloyd

In the early days, the Chinese authorities were against having railways in the country, but some foreign merchants had other ideas and, in 1872, sought permission to build a 'road' from Shanghai to Woosung, omitting to say that it would be a railroad. Building commenced in 1876 and despite strenuous objections from the Chinese, it was completed and a passenger service commenced later that year. Eventually the railway was bought by the Chinese and, in 1877, closed down. More details of this farce appear in a book by Peter Crush (*Woosung Road: the story of China's first railway*, The Railway Tavern, Hong Kong, 1999). Later in the 19th Century, more permanent railways were built and today China has an extensive railway network.

The first TPO in China began in 1903, during the Qing Dynasty. Subsequently many TPOs were introduced; some of them very lengthy and many continue to operate today. Over the years, several styles of TPO marks have been used, only a few of which are illustrated here.

A full account of the journey made by this postcard (Fig 1) would require knowledge of the China railway network as it was in 1916, but on 7 August the letter was in Foochow, in south-east China. It would have travelled to Nanking, where it crossed the Yangtze River by ferry to Pukow. By 13 August it was on the Bureau Ambulant No 2 train operating from Pukow to Tientsin. Two days later, it was on the Bureau Ambulant No 1 train operating from Peking to Mukden. The latter place, situated in southern Manchuria, is now called Shenyang. The journey continued through Manchuria, reaching Manchouli on 18 August, whence it continued into Russia on the Trans-Siberian Railway to Europe.

The People's Republic of China was founded in 1949 and various styles of postmarks were used in the early years. From 1957, new standardised double-ring cancels with the date in a rectangle were introduced; a TPO version is shown (Fig 2). The four characters at the top give the name of the train route: in pinyin romanization they are Guang Lin Huoche. Here, Guang and Lin are abbreviations for Guangzhou and Linli and *Huoche* means train. In this example, the name of the route is based on the termini of the TPO, but this is not always the case. The name Guangzhou appears in full at the bottom of the cancel and this is the dispatching office of the TPO, but some cancels have the dispatching office at the top and the train route name at the bottom. Also, the dispatching office is not always in parentheses. There is no indication of the direction of travel of the train.

In the late 1990s, a revised style of postmark was introduced: single-ring without rectangle round the date. The cover above (Fig 3) was issued in 2003 to celebrate the centenary of Chinese TPOs. The top characters in the c.d.s. are Hu Cheng Huoche and the controlling office is Shanghai. Here Hu is an alternative name for Shanghai and the train route is from Shanghai to Chengdu, a distance of some 2351 km.



Fig 1 Postcard sent from Foochow via railway in China and Russia to England (Reduced)

Below: Fig 2 Standardised double ring cancel



Fig 3 Revised style of TPO cancel used on the route from Shanghai to Chengdu in 2003 (Reduced)

The TPO and Seapost Society

Many Society members are specialists in their area and contribute to discussions and answer questions posed via the *Journal*. The Society also has appeal to collectors whose main areas are perhaps country specific where railway and maritime postal operations form just part of their interest. It has an extensive library and a website with a wide range of introductory articles. Members also participate in four postal auctions a year (with lists sent out with the quarterly editions of the *Journal*). The Society has an active book publishing programme and offers budding authors guidance and editorial support. It has published a DVD containing the first 60 years of the *Journal* and a comprehensive index of over 14,000 entries. If the marks discussed here could be part of your collection, and you are not already a member, then make your way to www.TPO-seapost.org.uk or just scan this code with your smart phone.



Alternatively, you can write to Chris Bartlett, Woodrich, Quarry Lane, Gorsley, Ross on Wye, Herefordshire HR9 7SJ.

