

# PAQUEBOT HANDSTAMPS: THE 1894 BRITISH OMNIBUS HANDSTAMP

By Mike Dovey

Mike Dovey looks at the British omnibus paquebot cancels introduced in 1894 shortly after the introduction of UPU regulations allowing their use. While numerous examples of this cancel have been found used in ports around the world, there is still much more to do to compile a comprehensive list. Could your collection fill in any gaps?

When the Universal Postal Union (UPU) was formed in 1874 to work on how mail could be directed all over the world eventually the subject of posting mail at sea became a topic of conversation. A formula was agreed at the Lausanne Convention in 1892 and eventually ratified at the Washington Convention in 1895.

The UPU decided that a ship on the high seas was the sovereign territory of the country and the port at which the vessel was registered and so if a ship was registered at Liverpool then outside of a country's own territorial waters and on the high seas then it was British and so a passenger could write a letter and post it in the ship's mailbox using British stamps purchased from the Purser. On arrival at the next port of call the Purser would empty the ship's mailbox and take the contents to the main post office in the port where the letters would be treated as 'paquebot' mail, handstamped with a paquebot postmark to signify that it was mail posted on the high seas and forwarded onwards on the next available ship.

## Omnibus handstamps

There is an argument amongst certain collectors for the term 'paquebot'. In 1894 the international language for law in the world was in fact French and so the word paquebot is said to be French for Packet Mail and when the new rules were ratified at Lausanne the term paquebot was instigated and used for the next 100 years. On 1 January 1894, when the new rules were made law, Britain and France were the first two countries to issue paquebot marks to various post offices using what have become known as 'omnibus' handstamps. For the purpose of this article the concentration will be on the British omnibus handstamp.

## PAQUEBOT

Fig 1 The single-line paquebot handstamp issued in Britain from 1 January 1894. It is known in purple, black and red

## The British omnibus paquebot handstamp

The General Post Office in London issued a new rubber single-line paquebot handstamp to a number of ports to be used from the 1 January 1894 (Fig 1). This was probably one of the first rubber handstamps to be used, as previously datestamps and handstamps were always metal. This caused a problem as metal datestamps needed one type of ink while rubber handstamps need another. Inkpads were issued with the new paquebot mark, usually in purple; however, many of the paquebot marks were applied using the metal inks in black and red, which caused the handstamp to go soft and eventually spread and distort.

Table 1 lists of all of the known ports and the dates for items seen and catalogued. However, like many historical events in postal history, the GPO in London seems not to have compiled a comprehensive list. So it could well be that there are other ports that could be added. For instance, Belfast and Cardiff are missing but surely examples from these two ports and others could be out there somewhere waiting to be discovered. There is no doubt that there will be items in collections that could extend the list of known dates.

The GPO in London also issued the paquebot mark to various overseas ports that British ships would regularly call at. This list is definitely incomplete as there must be other ports where there are no known postings to date – Singapore and

Table 1: Known ports that were issued with the omnibus paquebot mark and the dates of known usage

PORT	COUNTRY	DATES OF KNOWN USAGE
Bathurst	Gambia	1923
Bristol (Fig 2)	UK	1907 - 1913
Columbo	Ceylon	1894 - 1896
Constantinople (Fig 3)	Turkey	1904 - 1906
Dartmouth (Fig 4)	UK	1914 - 1928
Dover (Fig 5)	UK	1903 - 1910
Dublin & Cork TPO (Fig 6)	Ireland	1894 - 1895
Edinburgh (Fig 7)	UK	1894 - 1933
Folkestone	UK	1896
Gibraltar	Gibraltar	1894 - 1896
Glasgow (Fig 8)	UK	1901 - 1921
Grangemouth	UK	1894 - 1910
Gravesend	UK	1900
Greenock	UK	1901 - 1930
Grimsby	UK	1895 - 1912
Hull	UK	1894 - 1898
Leith	UK	1896 - 1907
Liverpool	UK	1894 - 1895
London (Fig 9, 10 and 11)	UK	1894 - 1923
Newcastle (Fig 12)	UK	1903 - 1920
North Shields	UK	1912 - 1950
Plymouth	UK	1895 - 1908
Plymouth T.P.O. (Fig 13)	UK	1897-1899
Port of Spain	Trinidad	1912 - 1914
Queenstown (Fig 14)	Ireland	1894 - 1898
St George's	Grenada	1895 - 1898
St Helier (Fig 15)	Jersey	1894 - 1911
St Peter Port	Guernsey	1903 - 1922
South Shields	UK	1894 - 1913
		1949 - 1950
Southampton (Fig 16)	UK	1899 - 1904
Valletta	Malta	1894 - 1901





Fig 2 The very rare Bristol 22F cancel together with a New York paquebot handstamp (Reduced)



Fig 3 An envelope with a rare Constantinople 22F paquebot handstamp (Reduced)



Fig 4 The extremely rare Dartmouth 22H posted from the Elders & Fyffes ship SS Bayano (Reduced)

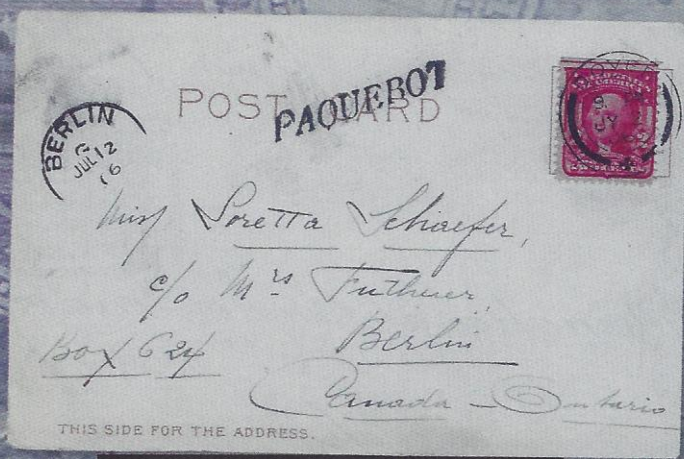


Fig 5 The very rare Dover 22F handstamp on a Red Star Line postcard (Reduced)

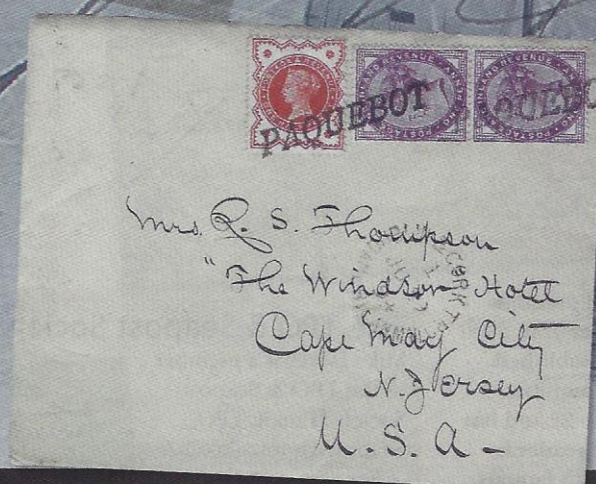


Fig 6 A Dublin & Cork TPO envelope with a 22E paquebot posted from on board the Cunard Line's SS Etruria (Reduced)

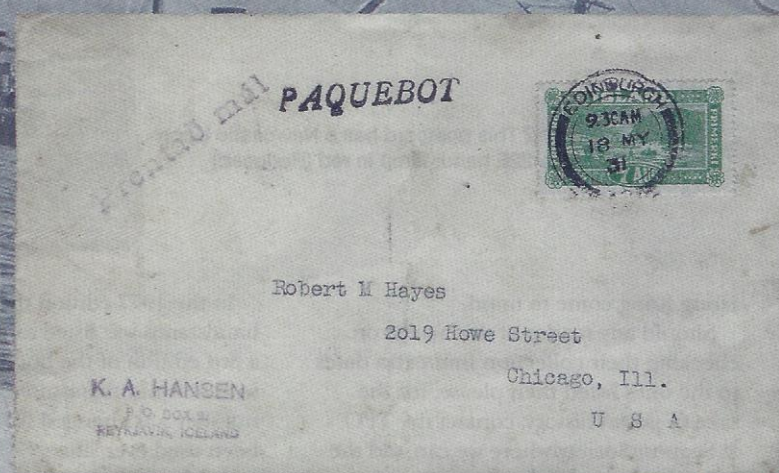


Fig 7 The Edinburgh 22D cancel on mail deposited from Iceland (Reduced)

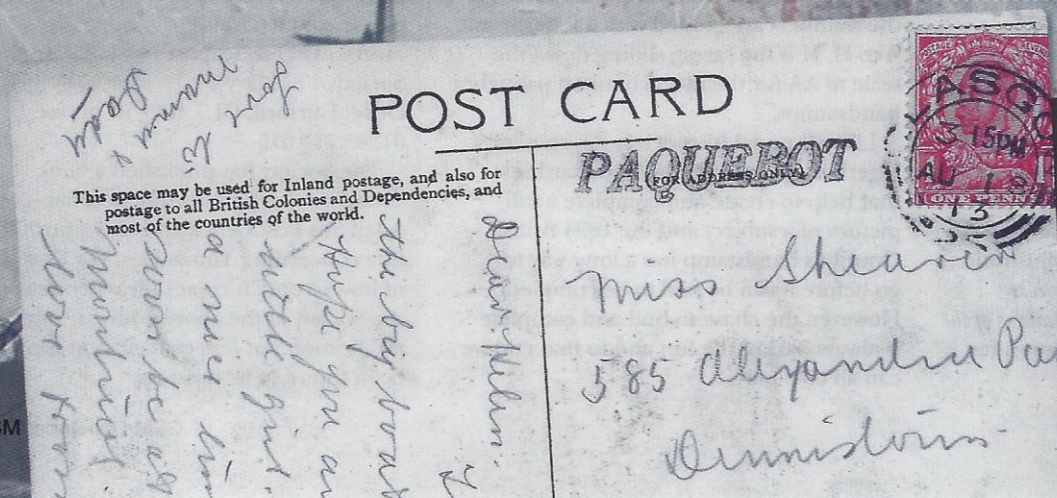


Fig 8 The Glasgow 22D cancel on a picture postcard from the Donaldson Line's vessel SS Letitia





Fig 9 The London 22B handstamp in red with also a 124B ship letter cancel (Reduced)

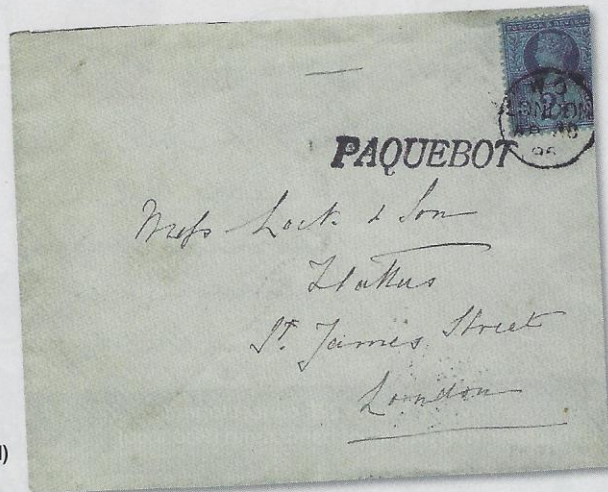


Fig 10 The London 22B handstamp in black (Reduced)



Fig 11 This envelope carried on the SS Orcana of the Pacific Steam Navigation Line vessel has a London 22B handstamp dated. It is dated 6 February 1894 on the reverse making it one of the earliest known dates recorded (Reduced)



Fig 12 This postcard has a Newcastle Upon Tyne 22E handstamp in red (Reduced)

Hong Kong come to mind.

Should any reader of this article on checking their collection find extra dates to the ones listed then please, for the sake of postal history, contact the TPO & Seapost Society where we can add the information.

## The definitive paquebot guide

The chart shown in this article is the result of the gathering of information by a number of writers over the years. In the early 1950s Stubbs published a first real attempt at listing paquebot handstamps. This was followed by books by Drechsel and finally in 1970 with a book with the best listing to date by the American Joesten. However, that book lacked any illustrations and so it was the 1977 publication by Roger Hosking, *Paquebot Cancellations of the World*, that really laid the foundation for collectors to list their items.

In the 1977 edition the 1894 omnibus handstamp was listed as number 7. In 2000 a 3rd edition of the book was published with new numbers and so the omnibus number was changed from 7 to 22 and has been used ever since. So if the reader is using the first two editions of this famous book then the omnibus paquebot is listed as number 7; however, for the next three editions then the number will be 22. All of the numbers are graded with a letter from A to H. H is the rarest, sliding down the scale to AA for the most common paquebot handstamps.

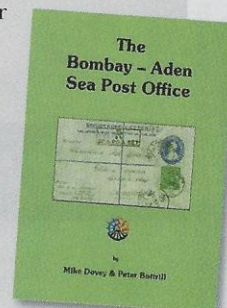
Like all postal history it is the coming together of envelopes and postcards etc that help to create and complete a full picture of a subject and the 1894 British Omnibus handstamp has a long way to go before it can be said to be complete. However, the chase to find and complete is always part of the fun and to that end we can all take part.

## The TPO & Seapost Society

Mike Dovey is a member of the TPO & Seapost Society (Email: TPO\_Seapost@hotmail.com).

For a free copy of the society's journal and a membership application form, please contact: Keith Morris, TPO & Seapost Society, 1 St Mary's Drive, Fairford, GL7 4LQ, or phone 01285 713 075

The Society has published a book shown on the right for the Bombay – Aden Sea Post Office and also a further title concerning Timetables. For details of how to obtain copies please contact the Society at the above address. Since publication not one cancellation has been found to be missing.





Briefkaart

Adressrijde

PAQUEBOT



Aan

Miss M. Rayfield

Wars.

N<sup>o</sup>

PAQUEBOT



Mrs. J. W. Pleasants  
 Menasha  
 Wisconsin  
 U. S. A.

Fig 14 A Queenstown 22E paquebot on an Cunard shipping line envelope in black

CARTE POSTALE

Correspondance

Tous les pays étrangers n'acceptent pas la  
 correspondance au recto, se reporter au verso.

PAQUEBOT

Adresse



Miss I Bassett

43 Kensington place

St Heliers

Fig 15 A postcard with a St Helier 22E handstamp and also a Jersey Mobile Box cancel

In laterra

PAQUEBOT



CP Douglas Esq

70 Camberwell New Road 70

Kennington S.W.

Londres.

Fig 16 An envelope posted with a Southampton 22C handstamp and a 214B Packet Letter cancel