
* AN A-to-Z OF INDIAN PHILATELY *

THE LETTER 'Q'.

by B. T. CHEVERTON.

It would require ingenuity - and more besides - to fill an album page with Post Office names for the letter 'Q'. There were but ten in the 1902 Post Office Guide as against about 2,000 for the letter 'K'. So, hurrah! for Queens Road, Ahmedabad.

Quinine was a well known specific - like powdered chalk and opium - for dealing with certain ailments, and quinine packets were sold over the Post Office counter as once were Lottery Tickets in Burma. However, during the 1939-45 war, when quinine was scarce, mepacrine tablets were sold instead. The sale (by the P.O.) of quinine resumed in 1947, although, by 1952, sales had fallen from 4,400 to 647 pounds a year, clearly reflecting improvement in other outlets for medical preparations.

The Post Office has, since 1950, sold Tuberculosis and Health seals although they did not sell the Gandhi 'Quit India' (or 'Boycott British Goods') labels! There have been many queer issues of labels, some of which were accepted by Postmasters for Postal Duty. The War Fund labels come readily to mind, but there are also 'Wireless' and 'Social Security' stamps for those who like these things. At Independence there was a massive issue of 'Jai Hind' labels, and I have a cover with twenty different labels to add to the 3½ annas adhesive required for mail to Burma on August 15th. 1947. None of the twenty labels attracted a cancellation, but one sees covers on which the clerk has been happy to service match box labels, Sunday School stamps, or whatever!

In the grounds of the Qutb Mosque in Delhi there is an old iron pillar, famous because of its wrought iron construction so that it remains free from rust or corrosion. It has a splendid antiquarian history but there is also a story that anyone who can stand with his hands behind him and touch finger tips around the pillar will be particularly lucky! My brother-in-law, who had broken his arm in childhood, was able to perform this trick quite readily, to the delight and 'shabash' of the small boys. But there was no Post Office there, only at Qutabnagar in Sitapur.

Villagers had a way of snaring birds with a net, after which the little protesters were carried many miles head high in baskets so that there would be Quail Pie for Sunday lunch in Ahmednagar. One did not buy dead birds and - just as mobile cows and goats were milked on the customer's premises - so there would be chicken tied to kitchen table legs awaiting their fate.

Doubtless this also happened in Quetta, although that place was 5,500 feet above sea level and accustomed to winter snow. The Royal Air Force had poignant memories of Quetta, and of the events of 1935, as noted under E for Earthquakes, when there were special cachets for mail allowed to travel free as a gesture of sympathy from the Government. The Staff College was at Quetta and it had its own Post Office. So, another hurrah! for the Staff College, Quetta, Post Office.

In Britain, the Post Office recently offered prizes for those who could correctly identify their Postal Code to a doorstep canvasser. In India they devised the Quick Mail System, which gave priority to letters showing the Postal Code. There had been earlier attempts to persuade the public to use District Numbers, as in Bombay, when slogan-like cachets were used to advise recipients of their correct District Number.

The Quick Mail Service (QMS) was, however, a National Campaign with special post boxes (notably at Airports) offering the attraction of next day delivery in certain towns when the correct postal code was used. To

assist all this the Post Office issued a PIN Code Directory, with PIN being short for Postal Index Number. India, we learn, was the 19th Country to introduce a Code system, although 'not for similar reasons'. A particular attraction for India was that the PIN Code (which also produced a rash of new postal stationeries) would pin-point destination regardless of the language used. In persuance of the Pin Code system India was divided into Zones (not Circles) - there being 8 in all. Zone 1, for example, was comprised of Delhi (the Union Territory), Haryana, Punjab, Chandigarh (Union Territory), Himachal and Jammu & Kashmir. Qazi Gund was given PIN (number) 192221, there being only six other Q post offices in 1973.

शिव डाक सेवा
QUICK MAIL SERVICE



CER

QMS 1



ett and Co Ltd.,
East Main Road,



Q.M.S.

QMS I
570 001



Brett & Co Ltd



R. M. M. Kogina,
4, Kera Kalla Bldg.,
29 Dume - Janshed Rd.

Q.M.S.



Q.M.S.



The presentation



The QMS system used special cachets and postmarks, variously as slogans, instructional markings or cancellations; and a great variety there were, with local Post Masters apparently free to use their own imagination. I remember advocating QMS as a worthwhile study activity for our Indian members; I also recall being told that it was a rubbish subject although 'rubbish' is a remarkably apposite word used by many 'philatelic wives' to describe everything from Scind Dawks to Bhutan 'smellies'.

However, some members did try to collect QMS information, only to discover that minor bureaucrats supposed the PIN Code to be some sort of secret mark and - like the Refugee Relief markings - something not freely available for the paying public. All this, of course, was nonsense but, sadly, off-putting.

QMS, introduced in 1975, was to meet a transient need. Its purpose was to encourage the regular use of Postal Codes, the message being conveyed in several ways. Anyone who has attempted a collection knows that a reasonable selection can be assembled for a modest outlay, and that the different markings are legion.

In my experience, the cachets were generally black or violet (although both colours are found with the same mark, for example at Egmore). It is the early days that provide the greatest interest. I show below the simple classifications I have adopted:-

- (1) Unboxed, in single or double lines, in English or Hindi or both, as example: QMS/CALCUTTA RMS SET 2.
- (2) Boxed, in one to four lines (Nagpur seen in red), as example:
Q.M.S./24 Dec 1976/Zimahabad H.O.
- (3) In Double or Single lined Oval, with great size variation, and 'QMS *' perhaps used exclusively with Experimental Post Offices.
- (4) In Double or Single lined Circular format, as example for Bangalore, which used at least five different handstamps, 'QMS I' to 'QMS IV', all in violet.

This latter circular format seems to have become quasi-standard and was used sometimes as a canceller, as example by Tirupati, although the separate cachets eventually gave way to the use of conventional cancellations with 'QMS' incorporated. Now, 'QMS' has gone, although PIN (numbers) are frequently included in the postmarks.

The campaign has been backed by a Slogan postmark 'PIN before you Post', but at a time when the public was being bombarded with slogans. The QMS subject, meanwhile, still awaits a proper study, which can only be a labour of love there is no money in QMS.

Quetta was an important Railway town with Institute and RMS Office. Early photographs of the Railway Station show that it was once one of many such without raised platforms. The static RMS Office was number J80, with the numbering for this series seemingly on a 'next number for the next Office opened' basis. Q was, I believe, the only letter not used by the Railway Mail Service in their numbering system for Travelling Post Offices too easily mistaken for O, presumably.

Quetta was also a State (I was surprised to learn) - the one and only Q - with Court Fee, Foreign Bill and Revenue stamps to add to the tally of overprinted British India stamps. I had supposed the 1 anna Revenue to be a fairly easy item, but Messrs. Koepfel & Manners have it at 30 dollars.

Qandahar is the second city in Afghanistan, more commonly known to the British as Kandahar. It was separated from Kabul for a turbulent period and there were British Army Campaigns in Qandahar for the Field Post Office enthusiasts.

At the time of Partition in 1947, Muhammed Ali Jinnah was known as Qaid-i-Azam or 'great leader', and the Pakistan stamps of 1949 commemorating the first Anniversary of Jinnah's death are known as the Quaid-i-Azam issue.

All too clearly, Q is not a philatelic letter, unless one would like to speculate on the dubious status of Queen's Camp Post Offices. However, taking a little licence with Hindi, we can say that the Village Post Office was a Qarya P.O. and that the Qasid who travelled from Q.O. to Q.O. with the tools of his trade was equipped with Qalam and Qainchi for writing and cutting.

Certainly Marco Polo can be forgiven for supposing that Quilon was Koilum.
