
 ** THE FRANKING MACHINE POSTS OF BRITISH INDIA, 1922-1947 **

by ERNEST G. OEHME.

The image shows two examples of franking machine posts. The top example is from Peter Walsham, Bristol (U.K.), and the bottom example is from Allan Downes, Ingle Farm, South Australia. Both examples show the original envelope with the franking machine post and the corresponding meter mark.

Example 1 (Top): Peter Walsham, Bristol (U.K.). The envelope is addressed to 'The Secy. Colonial Mutual Life Assn. 35. Poultry. 51-50p London E.C. England'. The meter mark is '1' and the postmark is 'CALCUTTA G.P.O. 16 IV 25'. The meter mark is '1' and the postmark is 'CALCUTTA G.P.O. 16 IV 25'. The meter mark is '1' and the postmark is 'CALCUTTA G.P.O. 16 IV 25'.

Example 2 (Bottom): Allan Downes, Ingle Farm, South Australia. The envelope is addressed to 'P. A. Templeton, Esq., Traffic Inspr., B.B. & C.I. Ry. Abu Road'. The meter mark is '4' and the postmark is 'CALCUTTA G.P.O. 1 VIII 31'. The meter mark is '4' and the postmark is 'CALCUTTA G.P.O. 1 VIII 31'.

Legend:

1. AUTOMATIC FRANKING MACHINE No 2
2. UNIVERSAL FM No 6 & 2.
3. NEO-POST.F.M. 1-3 IN MAGENTA OR RED INK.
4. NAME OF COY ON FLAP OF ENV.
5. P.O BACK-STAMP
6. PMK OF J. STONE & CO. CALCUTTA. LICENCE No C-11 IN BLACK INK.
7. PRINTED NAME ON FLAP
8. INITIALS & LICENCE No C-1 OF H.M. & CO. CALCUTTA. PMK IN BLACK INK.
9. 485 WITH FRANK 3 USED COMBINED IN MAGENTA INK.
10. 4 USED PENDING P.O. LICENCE No. 5 AFTER STANDARD LITERATURE CO. LTD.

In the middle of March 1986, two letters arrived at my address from members of the India Study Circle who, unknown to each other, and 12,500 miles apart, sought information on their respective cover and cards with different 'Meter Marks' (1 & 2 in above illustration). These members were Peter Walsham of Bristol (U.K.) and Allan Downes of South Australia.

It is not unusual for some frustrated members, and non-members too, occasionally to write to me for information on some facet of India's Postal History because they 'cannot find anything on the subject in the ISC's records'. Such omissions can be speedily remedied when the Collector and the Researcher unite and co-operate with each other to this end and for the benefit of their Society. And so, what began in March 1986 reached its completion by the publication of this article now before you. This is what it is all about.

During the British-India period (1922-1947, three different makes

of Franking Machines were used, namely (1) the Automatic Franking used by a few European firms in Calcutta in 1922, to be followed in 1923 by (2) the Universal Franking, which was followed in due course by (3) the Neo-Post in 1928.

The P.O. Dept., having the sole monopoly for levying rates of postage on Letter and Parcel Mails, would not allow any person, Firm, Company or Government Dept. to encroach on its preserves, and for any private or official Party to stamp and/or register articles of the Letter or Parcel Mails on their own premises must get permission from the P.O. Department to do so.

The P.O. Dept., having had no experience of Franking Machine usage, since only four machines had been imported in 1922 from New Zealand, nevertheless had had years of experience with European Firms since 1827 on the system of registering letters by such Firms on their own premises then sending them recorded in the Firm's Register Book under a 'Four Divisional' system - by which was meant that Local Letters, 'Country' Letters, 'Ship' Letters and 'Packet' Letters must be separately entered in their respective Register Books. By 'Country' Letters was meant 'Inland' which, with 'Ship' and 'Packet' became the modern 'Foreign Post'.

The European firms, having received permission to use their Franking Machines in their own premises, were obliged to open three separate Franking Machine Postage books for Local, Inland and Foreign articles. These books to be taken to the 'WINDOW' Clerk of their local P.O. for a careful check of the postage, then to stamp the respective original and duplicate copies in each book, tear off the top page for Official Record file, then return the books to the firm's messengers. Each Firm was allotted a particular period of the morning or afternoon period of the P.O.'s 'Business Hours' for attending at the 'Window'. The letters were then sent to the Postal Depts. to be date-stamped for Town Delivery, Inland or Foreign despatch as the case may be.

As far as the P.O. Dept. was concerned, the 1922 machines laid a heavy burden on its staff as regards stamping each item in the three different departmental offices. When the Universal Franking Machines arrived, the P.O. ordered the users of these new machines to make a special Postmark Die, which must be of a different geometric design from that used by the Post Office and must be with three compartments, the top to include either the name of the P.O. at which they present their franked correspondence, or the name or initials of the Firm. The central compartment to be slotted for the 'date type' and the lower for the P.O. Licence No. (see C & D in the above illustration). The usual magenta (red) ink to be used for the postage frank but the date-stamp to be used in black ink and to be applied carefully on the left of the frank by means of an evenly inked pad with Stephens' Black Ink. Thus the burden of stamping was now on the Firms and not on the Post Office.

These Universal Franking Machines began to be widely used both by private and official organisations until the arrival in 1928 (it was in 1924 that the first Rules and Regulations on Franking Machine postage came into being, which are now embodied in this article) of the 'NEO-POST' machine, imported from Germany, which was much advanced in its use for it combined both the dated postmark and the postage frank in the same magenta (red) ink. These machines were, however, quite expensive to buy or hire, but those who could afford them used them, whereas the others continued with their old Universal machines.

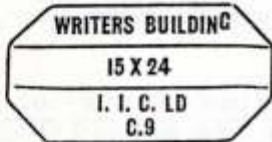
What I may have omitted about the Post Office's attitude concerning the Universal and Neo-Post machines will be better understood from the P.O.'s own Rules and Regulations, which remained in force from 1922 to 1947, which are now reproduced.

30. Machine-franked articles.—(1) Postage on postal articles (both official and private) may, under a license issued by the Head of the Circle, be paid by means of impressions of franking machines, which will be of a bright red colour and be made as far as possible on the right-hand top corner of the address side of the postal article itself or an address wrapper or an address label firmly attached to it. The franks recorded by each machine will bear an impression or impressions showing the amount of postage with the number of the machine in the centre, as in the specimens given below :—

INDIA POSTAGE ½A 4 ½A	INDIA POSTAGE 1 4 1A	INDIA POSTAGE 2A 4 2A	INDIA POSTAGE 3A 4 3A	INDIA POSTAGE 4A 4 4A	INDIA POSTAGE 8A 4 8A
HALF ANNA	ONE ANNA	TWO ANNAS	THREE ANNAS	FOUR ANNAS	EIGHT ANNAS

The illustrations are not exhaustive and licensees may arrange with the agents of franking machines for any anna or rupee denominations. The No. in the centre denoting the No. of the machine is different for each machine used.

Alongside the frank, there is a date-stamp impression showing the name of the office of posting and the date, as well as the identification mark of the licensee and the license No. preceded by the index letter of the Circle. A specimen of the date-stamp impression is reproduced below :—



In special cases, the impression of the date-stamp will be as shown below. It should be noticed that in these cases the letters TL preceded by the index letter of the Circle and followed by a No. appear in the place of the license No.



(2) Machine-franked articles must be handed in by a representative of the licensee over the counter at any post office. Each consignment must be accompanied by a window ticket for the identification of the licensee's servant. The postmaster of the office of posting is responsible for seeing that the articles have been franked in the prescribed manner and that systematic underpayment is not going on.

(3) The impressions of the franking machines recorded on postal articles should not be interfered with in any way. The article should be impressed with the date-stamp of the office of posting to indicate the date on which the article is actually posted, but in such a manner as not to interfere in any way with the impressions of the franking machine. If the franking impressions on articles indicate the place of origin and the date of posting at the post office, it is not compulsory to stamp such articles, except in the case of a registered or insured article bearing date-stamp impressions of a previous date. Moreover, the application of the stamp is not required on unregistered articles sent at a reduced rate of postage (printed papers, etc.) provided that the place of origin is indicated on the articles. The franks passed by the offices of posting should not be challenged by any other office, but the offices of delivery must carefully check the postage paid on machine-franked articles and if any underpayment is noticed, take action in the ordinary manner.

(4) Machine-franked articles posted in letter-boxes should be treated as unpaid articles. Unregistered articles bearing impressions of a previous date should not also be accepted nor should cut-out impressions pasted on a postal article be recognised in payment of postage.

(5) The following are the specimen impressions of the Neo-Post Franking Machine :—



An advertisement may also appear alongside the date-stamp impression provided that :—

- (1) it is first approved by the Head of the Circle in which the machine is used,
- (2) it relates solely to the business or profession of the licensee,
- (3) it is quite separate from the impressions of the identification marks, license number and the date-stamp and postmark,
- (4) it is confined to the top left-hand corner of the envelope, card, packet or parcel, and
- (5) the cost of cutting the die is met by the licensee.

31. Accounts with licensees of franking machines.—(1) An account will be maintained in the prescribed record book in duplicate with each licensee of a franking machine and payments will be made by him on account of postage or charges on State telegrams, in accordance with the procedure laid down in the *Posts and Telegraphs Initial Account Code*, Volume I.

(2) The invisible meter of the franking machine will be set to the figure representing the initial payments made by the licensee, by the suppliers under the supervision of an official of the local head office and be sealed with a post office seal. At intervals of not more than one month, the official of the post office concerned should visit the licensee to inspect the machine and if required will reset it with further amount paid. In the latter case, the original seal in the machine must be broken and after resetting, a fresh seal should be affixed. The amount paid and other particulars should be entered in the copies of the record book kept by the licensee and the post office, as prescribed in the *Code* referred to in the preceding paragraph. An account should be prepared in form Ms-10 which, after the accountant has signed the certificate, should be placed in separate files for each machine. The licensee's copy should be authenticated by the inspecting post office official and the post office copy should be checked after each visit by the postmaster.

Payment other than by cheque should be discouraged. If payment is made in cash, the official resetting the machine will obtain the signature of a responsible officer of the firm using the machine in the 'Remarks' column of the post office copy of the meter register book, and the treasurer of the post office when crediting the amount in the accounts of the post office will see that this has been done.

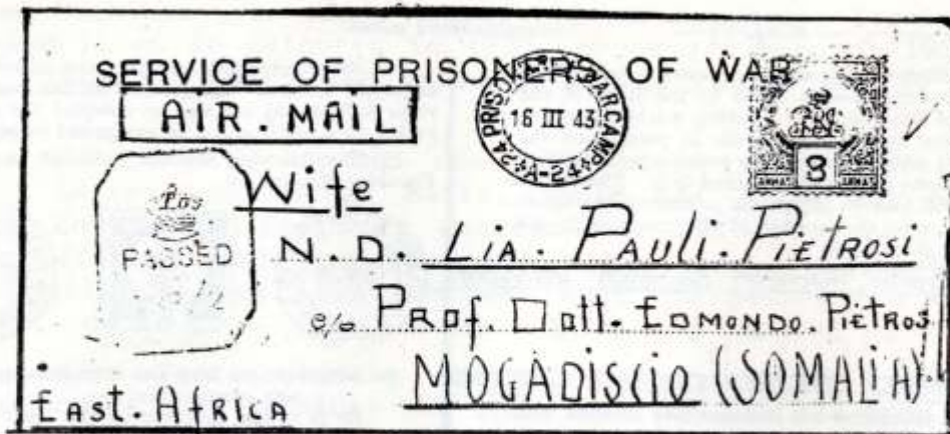
It is further prescribed that a postal official other than the one who reset the machines should carry out a random inspection of the franking machines, and see that the meter readings found on that day are in order as compared with those noted at the time of previous resetting. He will also note in the meter books, the meter readings as found by him, and report to the postmaster immediately in the event of any irregularity being noticed.

NOTE 1.—The post office seal for sealing franking machines must be kept by the postmaster in his personal custody. It should be handed over by the postmaster personally under written receipt to the official deputed to inspect and reset the franking machine and this official will be held personally responsible for its safe custody under lock and key when not in use by him personally and until it is returned to the postmaster.

NOTE 2.—The pliers for the lead seal which is used for preventing the unauthorised removal of the bottom will be in the custody of the agents for the supply of the franking machines. The impressions made by the pliers on the lead seals should be examined by the postmaster or, in the case of Presidency post offices, by an assistant presidency postmaster to see whether they are clear and distinct.



Not being a collector, I have no idea up to what year the Universal Franking Machines were used, or any of the Licensee's numbers. Nor do I know whether these machines were used elsewhere other than Calcutta. The Neo-Post machines were widely used by both private and official organisations in the other principal towns of India between 1928 and 1947, and, thanks to ISC member Frau Schneider-Filchner of Frankfurt, West Germany, we have information that one Neo-Post



machine was used by PRISONER OF WAR CAMP 24, located at Clement Town, Dehra Dun during World War II, as illustrated above, and dated 16 III 43.

What may appear to be the latest use of the Neo-Post machine is on the 'ON HIS MAJESTY'S SERVICE' postcard, postmarked 30 V 47, before the 'British-India' expression ceased to exist from 14 August 1947, and used by the Licensee's office, namely the Accountant General Bengal, Calcutta, No. A.G.B. C-327.

This postal history of the Franking Machine Posts of British India was made possible and quickly put together between 15 March and 15 April 1986 by three Collector members and one Researcher of the India Study Circle, through unity and co-operation.
