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 \* FROM BEARING TO POSTAGE DUE \*  
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by MAX SMITH

The recent Query 20/90 made me look again at the apparent gap between the 1837 pattern 'Bearing' handstamps which remained in use sometimes for several years past the introduction of postage stamps in 1854, and the boxed stamps reading 'Postage Due' which seem to have been introduced in 1873. In between those dates, from the early to mid-1860s, there also appeared 'IAN' or 'IAS' in various shaped boxes, but I am not going to go into those here. I have wondered for some time just when the terminology changed from Bearing to Postage Due.

As far as legislation was concerned, the Act of 1854 changed the way that unpaid mail was to be considered. Col. Martin, in reply to another query told us<sup>(1)</sup> that para XX of this Act dictated that letters shall be prepaid; if sent Bearing they shall be charged double. Para XXII also said that insufficiently prepaid letters shall be charged double the deficiency. Various notices in the Calcutta Gazette, quoted in Hausburg<sup>(2)</sup> say exactly the same thing.

It was clearly not necessary to issue a new set of handstamps as a result of this change. The 1837 pattern would do, with no difference except that new rates of postage would have to be written on. The Act of 1837 had decreed that the Office of Despatch was to regulate the levy of postage<sup>(3)</sup>. In other words, that office should enter in its Bearing stamp the amount of postage to be collected. The Receiving Office would add its own Bearing stamp but would not enter any amount in it.

The number of letters posted unpaid would of course be expected to drop considerably with the now penal rates. The Annual Reports of the Post Office throw some interesting light on what actually did happen. A selection of the statistics illustrates the trend:

THOUSANDS OF LETTERS POSTED (Excluding Newspapers, Registered & Service)

Year	Paid	Unpaid	Total	% Unpaid	Year	Paid	Unpaid	Total	% Unpaid
49/50	4,310	5,808	10,118	57.4	61/62	18,434	14,328	32,862	43.6
53/54	4,547	7,625	12,172	62.6	63/64	20,564	16,642	37,206	43.9
55/56	15,948	7,580	23,529	32.2	65/66	22,435	19,904	42,339	47.0
57/58	18,323	11,217	29,540	37.9	67/68	34,995	22,321	57,316	38.9
59/60	19,788	14,100	33,888	41.6					

The number of unpaid letters immediately before the 1854 Act exceeded that of paid. It actually dropped in the following 2 years, whilst the number of paid almost quadrupled. But within a short time the number began to increase. The Director-General of P.Os. evidently had little faith in the postal system:

"I am inclined to be of the opinion that the increase in Bearing letters is to be attributed, in some degree, but not wholly, to distrust in the Post Office. It is commonly believed that a letter bearing postage is more secure, and more speedily delivered, than a paid letter. There are doubtless some good grounds for this opinion; pre-payment lessens the chance of security not only before but also after letters are posted, and it may tend to retard delivery, inasmuch as the Postmen are obliged to deliver Bearing letters quickly or return them; whereas they may delay, or fail to deliver Paid letters, without immediate chance of detection, more particularly as it is well known that many letters are written and sent Bearing that are never meant to be received or paid by the addressee"<sup>(4)</sup>.

Other reasons were also advanced:

"....This may be fairly attributed to the general habit of natives, especially those in the army, and also the lower classes, to despatch their letters Bearing, more particularly at this period when from the constant movement of troops from one place to another, and the disturbed state of the country, they are undoubtedly liable to miscarry;"<sup>(5)</sup>.

"....It is worthy of remark that a large proportion of unpaid correspondence in NWP, Punjab, Bengal and Bombay is owing to the large number of places of pilgrimage in these provinces, to and from which a vast number of covers bearing postage is despatched owing to uncertainty of their reaching addressees who have no fixed abode."(6).

The reorganisation of the District Posts meant that the role of the Police was no longer seen to include the delivery of letters:

"....the delivery of District post correspondence through the agency of the Police having been altogether stopped, almost all the letters intended for delivery in the interior of Districts were treated as unclaimed and forwarded to the Dead Letter Office."(7).

The rate of increase of unpaid letters continued to outstrip that of paid, until the 1866 Act caused a sudden rise in paid letters by, among other things, removing the abuse of free franking of Service letters. In view of these numbers, very little material has survived.

Both Hamilton(8) and Misra(9) tell of the elaborate checking systems which had been introduced in Delivery Offices in order to prevent Delivery Peons overcharging addressees and pocketing the excess. As part of these measures the postage to be collected was registered in the Delivery Peon's book, Form 28(10). The amounts were laboriously recorded under each class of article, and in the smaller Offices the address too had to be recorded. The Peon had to obtain a signature for every article delivered and the amount collected would be checked against these entries.

The 1858 P.O. Manual gives instructions on how unpaid letters were to be treated. It was presumably at this date that the large 1837 pattern stamps were finally replaced, and it is worth reproducing a section of these Rules in full:

"299. A circular stamp, about three quarters of an inch in diameter, will be used in stamping letters received for delivery or posted in any office for despatch. All letters received will be marked with a red impression on the back. Those despatched will, if pre-paid, be stamped in red on the back; if unpaid, they will be stamped in black on the address side.

300. Re-directed letters should be stamped with a black impression on the back of the letter, an oval stamp being used.

301. Besides the above stamp, which must be dated, it will be convenient to supply the larger offices with stamps bearing the words 'Too Late', 'Refused', 'Returned', 'Not paid in full', 'Unclaimed', to be impressed on letters which may be posted too late, may be refused or returned, insufficiently paid or unclaimed.

302. All Letters, Papers & Packets whatever received at any Post Office in India, for despatch by Post whether paid, stamped or liable to postage, as the case may be, are to be marked with the appropriate stamp bearing the name of such office of despatch, and when slide stamps showing the month and year are not provided, the said date must be entered in writing across the middle of the face of the stamp. If the Letter or Packet received for despatch be bearing postage, the amount of postage due must be entered in writing on the face of the Letter.

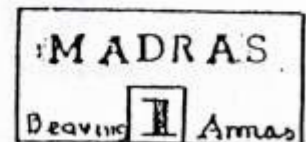
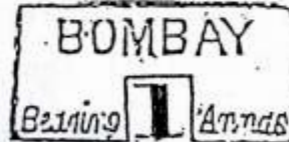
303. All Letters, Papers & Packets whatever received at any Post Office by post, for delivery at such office, are in like manner to be stamped with the appropriate Office Stamp, and marked with the date of the month and year, but the amount of postage paid or due is not to be marked unless the Letter has been under charged with Postage at the Despatching Office."

It has always puzzled me, in the light of these instructions, why there should exist so many covers which show no amount in manuscript. I can only imagine that as long as the accompanying documentation (chalan) was correctly completed Rule 302 was not vigorously enforced, even after the letter was checked by the Delivery Office. It will have been obvious that a letter was Bearing, for letters were sent from one office to another divided into paid, unpaid and Service(11). It was not the only Rule which seems to have been ignored or amended, for in strictness all letters, paid or unpaid, should have been stamped in red by the Receiving Office, but in my experience red was exclusively reserved for paid letters. Unpaid letters were always stamped in black.

I shall look first at what has been recorded from the GPOs and then at each Postal Circle in turn.

GENERAL POST OFFICES

There is not a great deal of material recorded, except from Calcutta, who used purpose-made Bearing stamps from 1861 to 1874 in blue-green ink. They clearly show the amounts of postage to be collected. There is evidence that Bombay used the rectangular stamp originally intended for Newspapers or Ship Letters to indicate any unpaid or underpaid mail, and one or two more rectangular stamps too. I must presume that Madras had similar ones. Examples of the basic type are shown below.



BOMBAY CIRCLE

The earliest Bearing stamp which is not the 1837 pattern seems to come from the Bombay Circle. I have an incomplete strike on a part cover of a circular Pahlunpore Bearing stamp dated 1859, illustrated below. It is in the same style as a series of circular Paid despatch stamps used at Bombay and other places in the Bombay Circle from 1857 onwards.

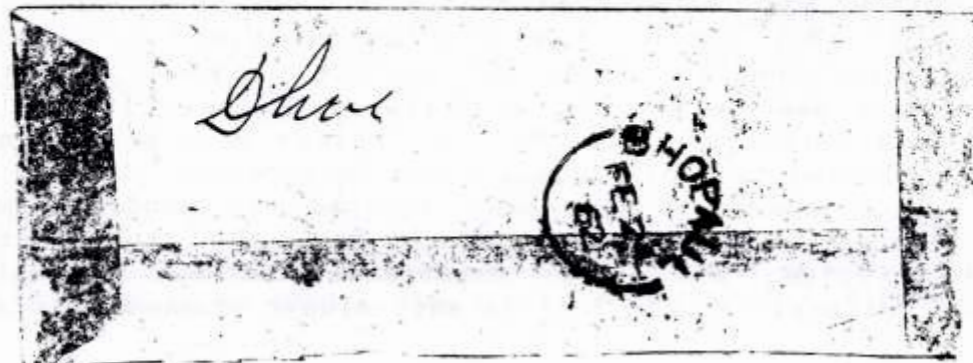


The Bearing stamp is in blue ink, as opposed to the red of the Paid stamps. Clearly every Office which was equipped with a Paid stamp will also have had a Bearing stamp, yet I can find no record of any other to date. The stamp does not leave room for any amount of postage to be entered.

Still in the Bombay Circle, I have several unpaid covers from the 1860s with small black circular datestamps in a rather similar style but without the word Bearing. They too show no charge or amount of postage to be collected. They do not seem to be Service letters. The envelopes are not foreshortened and appear complete.



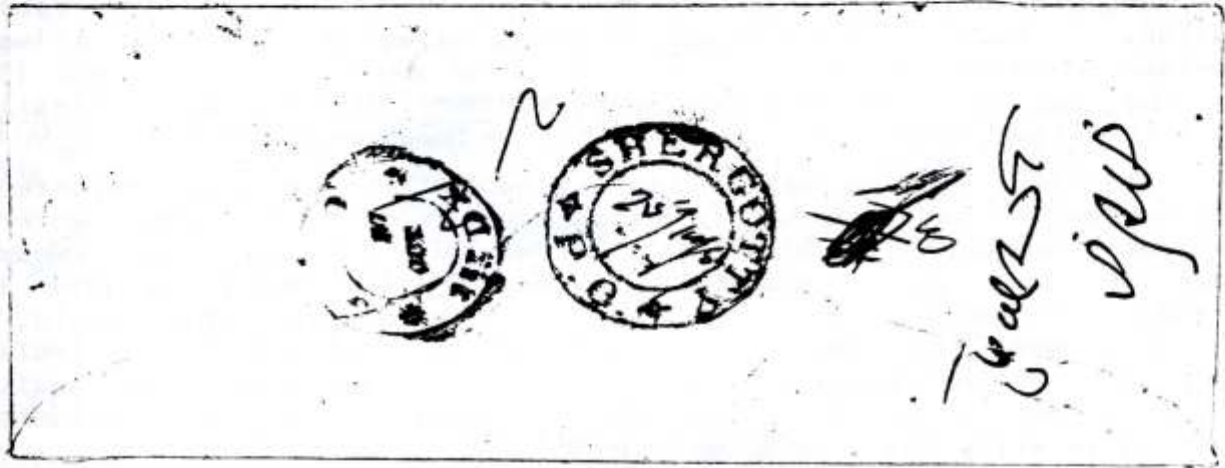
Bhopaul to Indore 186?.



Dhar to Bhopaul (or Bhopaul to Dhar) 1862.

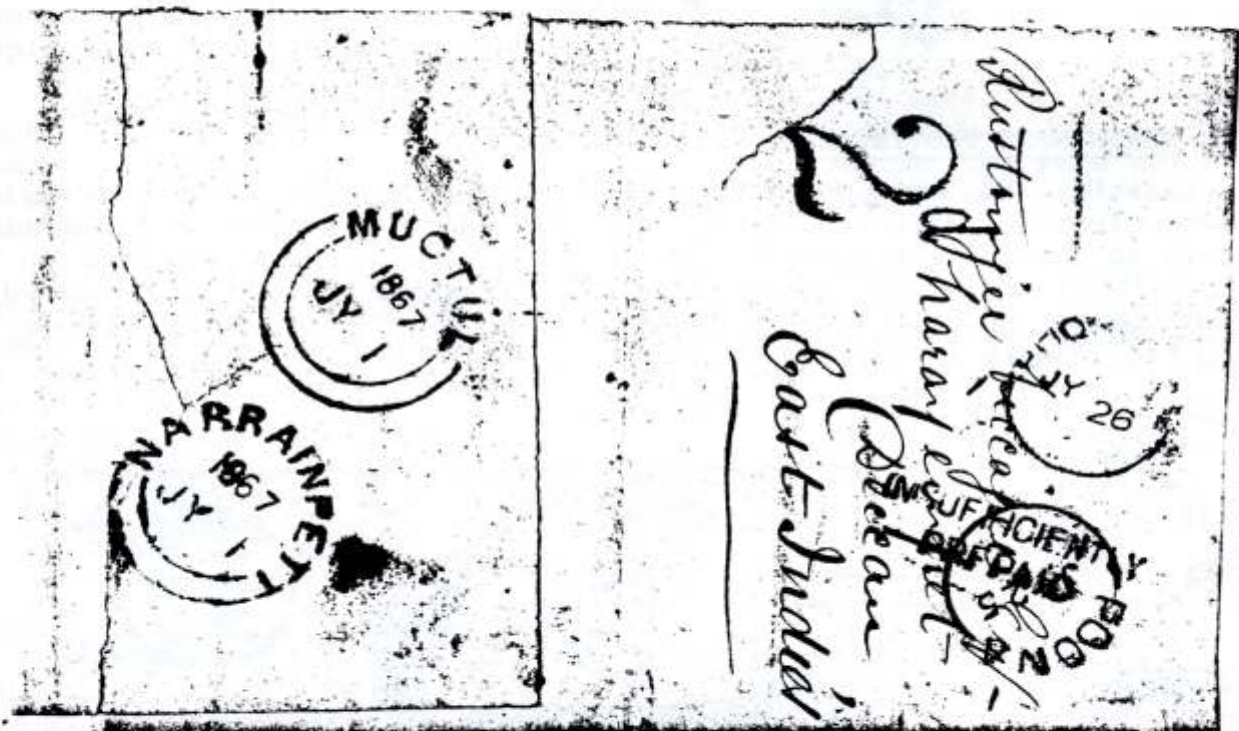
BENGAL CIRCLE

An unpaid cover from Shergotty to Calcutta in 1857 shows the normal double-circle despatch stamp in black, with the date completed in manuscript. What looks like 'las' was entered in manuscript, which has been crossed out and substituted by two figure '2's. Presumably the letter was found to be undercharged and exceeded half a tola when it was checked before delivery.



MADRAS CIRCLE

This Circle was the only one whose datestamps were either manufactured in Britain, or else made locally to a very high standard and modelled on the British pattern. It was also the Circle which had the lowest incidence of unpaid mail. Even before the 1854 Act, unpaid mail was only 44% of the total, as opposed to an average of over 67% in the other 3 Circles. By 1859/60 it still accounted for only 26.7% of the total.



An incoming unpaid newspaper wrapper from the U.K. in 1867 shows black impressions of Muctul (the H.O.) and Narrainpett (the Delivery Office) without any indication of the charge to be collected. Note also that black stamps of Poona and (probably) Sholapore have been added as sorting marks. The 'Insufficiently Prepaid' is not an Indian mark.

### PUNJAB CIRCLE

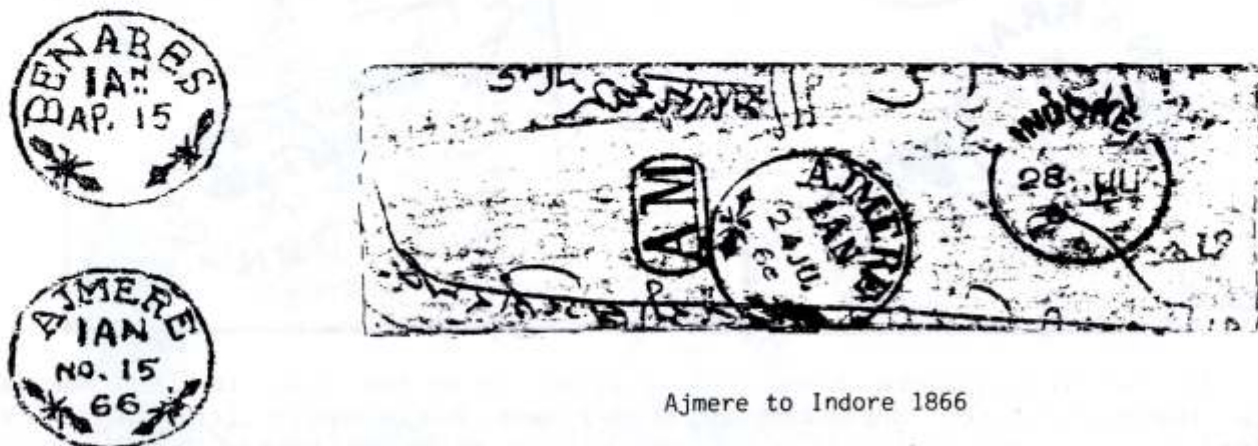
Quite different stamps have been reported from the Punjab Circle. An early Query in 1960 (12) seems to have referred to sightings of a stamp in the same style as Philip Young's Lahore example illustrated both by Gog Horsman (13) and shown more recently in the Q & A column (14). No illustrations were provided for the original query, which describes "... 'IAS' in a black delivery backstamp of Amritsar on a cover despatched from Rawulpindee franked with a ½-anna adhesive but also an 'Insufficient' marking..." and "... in a black despatch stamp of Murree on a 1-anna envelope addressed to Rawulpindee...". The dates were 1864 and 1866, and the use by both Despatch and Delivery Offices is interesting. Basil Cheverton illustrated an example from Mooltan in 1863 (15).

A further type of stamp used in the Punjab Circle was reported by Bill Northey (16) and although it was impressed on covers which were not apparently unpaid, the similarity between it and the Bombay examples above will not go unnoticed. Murdan only was reported, from 1860 to 1865. Presumably these covers were underpaid rather than unpaid, for I have a cover from Peshawar to Umritsur in 1863 with an E. India ½ and a 'IAS' of Umritsur, although curiously this is in red. The addition of an amount in the datestamp was presumably to cut down the effort required to write the amount on each article.



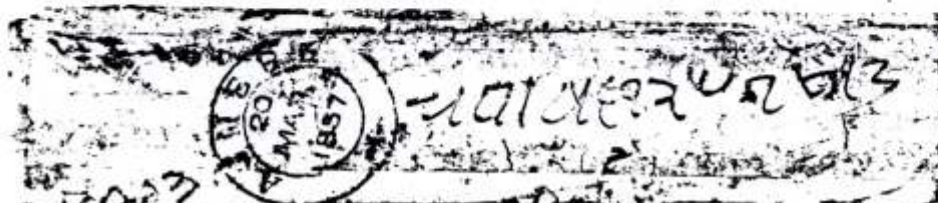
### NORTH WEST PROVINCES

Lastly, the North West Provinces used yet another different style. Jimmie Gledhill illustrated 2 examples in the course of reporting answers to the earlier query (17) and drew all the threads together in an article (18) in which he reported use at Benares in black (undated), and at Ajmere in black (1866) and blue (1869). I can show an example on cover from Ajmere (in black) to Indore in 1866.

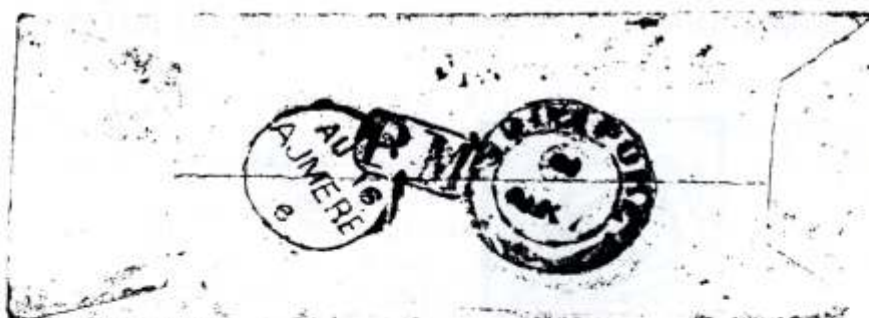


He also mentioned an example with sans-serif letters from Allygurh in 1865. Philip Young has illustrated Allygurh and Jubbulpoor with fleurons, and Meerutt without<sup>(19)</sup> to which I can add an example with fleurons from Muttra dated 1864. The 1858 Delhi Bearing stamp is probably unique - a makeshift replacement for a datestamp.

It is also clear that not every Office in the N.W.P. did not use stamps with an amount in them, and it is not surprising that the greatest variety comes from here, for this Circle had consistently the highest proportion of unpaid mail throughout the whole of this period.



? to Ajmere 1857



Shikapore to Ajmere 1866

But the question that is still unanswered is when Bearing became known as Postage Due. Certainly none of the stamps used in the 1860s used Postage Due; the boxed stamp was not prescribed until 1873, and it was not used in the Annual Reports. On the other hand, Bearing does not appear after 1867, and there seems a good case for its having been replaced by Unpaid in the interim.

An interesting absentee from the stamps used is one showing 'Not paid in Full' as prescribed by the 1858 Manual. 'Insufficient' stamps are found from 1861 onwards and this may be the term which was universally applied. These come in various shapes and sizes and have been dealt with by Basil Cheverton<sup>(20)</sup>.

At the same time, dedicated Sorting Offices were established in 1861/62 and will have been equipped with new stamps. At some stage the black triangular stamps seem to denote 'unpaid' or 'underpaid' sorting as opposed to the red triangular stamps found on paid letters. Dates seem to be between 1868 and 1872. This is an area worthy of study, which perhaps we can develop further.

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REFERENCES:

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| (1) Q11/68 'India Post' No.11 p.103                                  | (10) M.M.Inamdar - 'Bombay GPO' Appendix VII |
| (2) 'Postage & Telegraph Stamps of India'                            | (11) P.O. Annual Report 1861/62 para.16      |
| (3) Post Office Regulations 1839; Rules for Using P.O. Stamps para.2 | (12) Q60/19 ISC Bulletin No.48 p.76          |
| (4) P.O. Annual Report 1855/56 para.133                              | (13) Q6/71 'India Post' No.26/27 p.50        |
| (5) NWP Report 1857/58 para.26                                       | (14) A20/90 'India Post' No.107 p.33         |
| (6) P.O. Annual Report 1861/62 para.80                               | (15) 'India Post' No.96 p.50                 |
| (7) NWP Report 1864/65 para.244                                      | (16) Q60/19 ISC Bulletin No.49 p.10          |
| (8) 'Outline of Postal History and Practice' pp.158-160              | (17) ISC Bulletin No.63 p.29                 |
| (9) 'Postal Communications in India 1773-1834' pp.445-6              | (18) ISC Bulletin No.71 pp.55-56             |
|  | (19) A20/90 'India Post' No.107 p.33         |
|  | (20) 'India Post' No.96 p.50                 |

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