



No. 69.

GOVERNMENT NOTIFICATION.

The following Annual Report for 1876, received from the Postmaster General, is published for general information.

By Command,

H. E. WODEHOUSE,
Acting Colonial Secretary.

Colonial Secretary's Office, Hongkong, 24th March, 1877.

GENERAL POST OFFICE,

HONGKONG, *March 23rd, 1877.*

SIR,—I have the honour to report on the British Postal Service in China and Japan during 1876.

2. The past year has witnessed preparation for, and in some cases the completion of important changes, chiefly the entrance of this Colony into the General Postal Union, and the voting of an annual contribution of £3,150 from Postal Revenue towards the conveyance of Mails. But, with the exception of some minor details, the Union arrangements are not as yet complete. They will commence on April 1st.

3. Letter and newspaper postage to the United Kingdom via Brindisi and Marseilles have been each reduced by one penny, and a sixpenny tariff by the American route has been introduced.

4. The charges on local letters (that is to say on those exchanged between British Offices in China and Japan, and to or from Cochin China, Siam, or the Philippines) have been reduced by one half, whilst Canton and Macao have been admitted into the system of penny postage in force in Victoria. The Macao Post Office has consented to deliver local correspondence free. Some years ago a letter from Swatow to Macao would have cost 8*d*, besides a charge on delivery. It is now delivered free for 2*d*.

5. An Honorary Agency has been opened at the new port Kiung Chow in Hainan, through the kind assistance of successive Vice-Consuls, Messrs. FORD and HARVEY. Though the amount of Postal business is small, the Agency has been a convenience to the residents, and the gentlemen who have carried it on are entitled to the thanks of all interested in the trade. An overland courier was at first despatched monthly from Canton, and was courteously placed at the disposal of this Office by E. BREXON, Esq., the Commissioner of Customs. But as communication by sea proved to be not infrequent the courier was discontinued.

6. H. B. M. Vice-Consul at Tamsui was good enough to propose a similar Honorary Agency at that place, but considerations of a general nature, affecting the whole of the smaller Treaty Ports, have intervened to delay the acceptance of this offer.

7. Facilities for the Registration of correspondence to and from Bangkok have been established, through the cooperation of H. M. Consul General at that Port.

8. A mail sent by British steamer to Bangkok was delayed two months, in consequence of the Master's omission to land it. This vexatious circumstance led to an enquiry into the state of the law as to the delivery and reception of Mails at Consular Ports, which was found to be complicated and unsatisfactory. The whole question has been referred to the Home Government.

9. It is matter of regret that circumstances have again prevented an Inspection of the subordinate Post Offices and Agencies, which, however, it is hoped to undertake early in the present year.

10. On the 19th July the Occidental and Oriental Company's steam-ship *Gaelic* arrived here without any Mail from the United States, the Company having refused to carry U. S. Mails without a subsidy, and since that date these Mails have arrived monthly by the Pacific Mail Packets instead of fortnightly by either line.* The return Mails have been carried by the O. & O. steamers as formerly.

* The O. & O. Company resumed carrying the Mails with the year 1877.

11. Means have been devised for forwarding correspondence for Canada, the West Indies, Brazil, Peru, &c., by way of San Francisco; also for sending letters for India by the one French Packet a month which formerly carried no Indian Mail, thus making five regular opportunities for Indian correspondence in every month. The somewhat clumsy expedients, by means of which alone these objects could be attained, will soon, it is hoped, be superseded by the simpler and uniform method of the Postal Union.

12. After considerable delay, due to the miscarriage of an official letter, a satisfactory Postal Convention has been concluded with Netherlands India.

13. Correspondence has taken place on the question of a Postal Convention with Queensland, a sixpenny tariff viâ Torres Straits being the object in view. But the difficulties of sea-conveyance have not yet been sufficiently overcome to allow of the matter being laid officially before you.

14. It has been ascertained that the Australian Post Offices deliver free all private ship correspondence arriving *in Mails*. The antiquated and vexatious charge of 4d. a letter, formerly levied here even on prepaid correspondence received by private ship from Australia, has therefore been abandoned. This Office now delivers free in China and Japan all ship mails from all parts of the world, with one trifling exception. † Loose letters are of course charged as formerly.

15. A misunderstanding, for which this Office was not responsible, having been removed, the Torres Straits Route is now open for New Zealand as for other parts of Australasia. The packets on this line have made more regular passages during the year, and all correspondence for Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria, New Zealand, or Tasmania is sent by them unless it be specially directed for the route viâ Galle.

16. The Local Money Order system has been supplemented by an arrangement for the purchase of Hongkong Postage Stamps at the Agencies of this Office, thus facilitating the exchange of small sums of money anywhere on the Coast.

17. Correspondence has taken place as to the extension of the Money Order system to Queensland, New South Wales, the Straits Settlements, and India. A regulation of the Postal Union, somewhat too stringent perhaps, forbids the sending of coin in even a Registered Letter. This makes it desirable to extend Money Order facilities as widely as possible. Formerly, a small sum could be remitted to almost any part of the world by enclosing gold coin in a Registered Letter.

18. Some difficulty is caused by the necessity for providing for Chinese Remittances. The confusion likely to be caused by Chinese names, and the various ways of Anglicising them, may be prevented by a very simple expedient. But a more serious impediment, especially with regard to the Straits Settlements, is the fact that many of the Payees of the Money Orders would reside in the interior of China, quite out of reach of any of the Agencies of this Office. This is a point which should be taken into account by those who think that sweeping measures ought to be brought to bear on Chinese correspondence. No doubt many systematic evasions of Postal law are practised by Chinese, but some of them at least arise from the fact that the Chinaman can do for himself, easily, cheaply, and safely, what the British Post Office cannot do for him at all.

17. When the *Sunfoo* was wrecked in 1874, a large number of Chinese money-letters were removed from her and handed to this Department. They were all for villages beyond Amoy, to which Port they were sent. But neither by advertising nor by any other of the means employed was one of those letters delivered. After lying at Amoy for some time, and being advertised in Chinese here, they were all returned to Singapore.

18. If the Chinese generally were inclined to ask for Government aid in disposing of their correspondence, and to complain of their own existing arrangements, there would be very good reason for interfering with them. But probably the only Chinese dissatisfied with native Postal facilities are those who see their way to making a large profit out of a monopoly, and it must be remembered that representations as to the insecurity of the Chinese post are generally coloured to suit the interested views of these people.

19. On the great trade routes where Chinese are pushing their way, as for instance between Hongkong and San Francisco, or between Hongkong and Australia, there is an increasing tendency to use the Foreign Post Office, as Western business habits become more and more adopted.

20. A new Post Office Ordinance was drawn during the year by the Honourable J. BRAMSTON, Attorney-General, and has been passed. It "brings the Postal law of the Colony into accord with the actual state of the Service as it has grown up since the Ordinance of 1862 was passed. It provides for changes which may be found necessary.....and makes such amendments as experience has shewn to be desirable." What has been said above as to Chinese correspondence will explain why no additional legislation on this subject was recommended when the Ordinance was under consideration. At the same time it ought to be noted that the Singapore Post Office appears to be meeting with some success in its efforts to promote a use of the Post Office by Chinese, efforts which, it is hoped, have been seconded here in every way which could be suggested. The two Colonies do not, however, occupy exactly similar positions, and only a careful observation of the Singapore experiment can decide whether it might advantageously be tried in Hongkong. The experience of another year may be necessary for the maturing of any scheme for Chinese Sub-Post Offices here.

† The exception is Manila, which will be a Union Country after April 1st.

21. The English Mail twice arrived unsorted during the year, each time from a cause which could not have been foreseen. The Messageries Maritimes Company have most kindly given permission for the sorters to be sent to Singapore in the Company's packets when there are no other means of conveying them in time. Sincere thanks must also be tendered to the Agents of other steam lines, who give passages to the sorters on nominal terms every winter.

22. The Registration of letters at sea, mentioned in the Report for 1875, has been a complete success. Registered correspondence is now delivered almost as soon as landed.

23. The Department has suffered the loss of Mr. J. M. BARRADAS, late Marine Sorter, a faithful public servant, who died at Singapore. During the 8½ years that he sorted the Mails at sea he made more than 100 trips to that Port, and it is not recollected that any complaint of his sorting was received.

24. The number of complaints received during the year has been trifling, they have related chiefly to missing periodicals or samples. In some cases the articles had been duly received, in others they had been detained as ineligible for transmission. No Registered Letter has been lost.

25. A letter was received here which was being sent round the world westward with a view to its subsequent exhibition at the Centennial Festival at Philadelphia. A payment of 5*d.* in America and of 2*s.* 1*d.* in Hongkong* would carry such a letter by the most advantageous route entirely round the globe in about 80 days. It would bear the dates of four Post Offices only, the Office of origin in America, San Francisco, Hongkong, and London; and the Postage Stamps of two, America and Hongkong. Were it Registered the whole way the total cost would be increased to five shillings. But by availing of a private steamer from Hongkong, a letter could be sent entirely round the world, probably in less than 100 days, for 1*s.* 1*d.*, which would be thus divided:—

American Office,.....	5 <i>d.</i>
Hongkong Office,.....	3½ <i>d.</i>
London Office.....	4½ <i>d.</i>

It is worth recollecting that for such trivial sums (which will be still smaller under the Postal Union) a letter is carried by steam across three great Oceans, and through such works as the Suez Canal, or the Mont Cenis Tunnel.

26. It is to be hoped, however, that sending letters round the world may not become a popular pastime, or it will constitute as serious a nuisance as the incessant demands of Postage-stamp collectors. The senders seem to forget that greenbacks, or the Postage-stamps of their own country, are not available everywhere, and that the trouble they give leads to no practical result of any kind.

27. The subject of Revenue would indeed be discouraging were it not remembered how completely the service has been in a transition state during the whole year, and also that it has been working under nearly every possible disadvantage. The report for 1875 predicted (par. 14) "a further and perhaps a considerable decrease in Revenue." That this has been realised is only too evident from the following figures:—

	1875.	1876.		
Imperial Share of Revenue,...	\$110,894.43	\$109,044.68	Decrease	\$ 1,849.75
Colonial Expenditure,.....	\$ 36,335.47	\$ 37,934.34	Increase	\$ 1,598.87
Colonial Profit,.....	\$ 26,152.03	\$ 13,828.13	Decrease	\$12,823.90
Gross Revenue,.....	\$173,381.93	\$160,807.15	Decrease	\$12,574.78

28. It might appear from the above that the falling off of Revenue has affected this Department alone, and not the London Office. If, however, the sums credited to that Office are examined in Sterling instead of in Dollars a different result will be apparent. There was paid to the London Office in 1875,

.....	£22,665 18 11
in 1876,	£21,217 8 0
Decrease,	<u>£ 1,448 10 11</u>

or, at the average rate of exchange for the year, \$7,446.34.

29. The increase of Colonial expenditure is mainly in payments to ship-masters, and to the American and Japanese Post Offices for the conveyance of Mails.

30. The net falling off in Colonial Revenue is \$11,725.03, of which half at least has arisen from loss on exchange in remitting to England. The remainder must be ascribed to the competition of the American and Japanese Post Offices at Shanghai, Hankow, Ningpo, Nagasaki, Hiogo, Yokohama, and to some extent at Foochow; to the development of the Shanghai local Post Office at most of the above Ports; to the great reductions in the profit this Office was making on correspondence to the Continent of Europe (see Report for 1875, par. 14); and to the lowering of the local rates of Postage; whilst unfortunately the new Post Office Ordinance, which is to lessen some of the outgoings of the Department, has not even yet received approval at home.

31. If even, however, it could be shewn that the whole decrease, instead of a small part of it, were due to the lowering of the local rates, the responsibility for that change would be accepted by this Department. The rates were too high, and the Hongkong Office was being left behind the times. Our revenue might be made an excuse for any exorbitant charge whatever.

Under the Postal Union only one payment would be necessary.