



SUPPLEMENT

To the HONGKONG GOVERNMENT GAZETTE of 28th January, 1888.

GOVERNMENT NOTIFICATION—No. 41.

The following Annual Report of the Postmaster General, which was laid before the Legislative Council on the 25th instant, is published for general information.

By Command,

FREDERICK STEWART,
Colonial Secretary.

Colonial Secretary's Office, Hongkong, 28th January, 1888.

GENERAL POST OFFICE,
HONGKONG, *January 3rd, 1888.*

SIR,—I have the honour to report on the British Postal Service in Hongkong and China during 1887.

2. There is not much to record, nor indeed, as far as Hongkong is concerned, can there be much in the way of progress to record until the Department ceases to be cramped by a wholly inadequate building. The limits of development of the service in the existing structure have been fully reached, nor can any marked improvement of organisation be expected until room is provided for a larger staff and more extended operations. Economy of space has been carried so far in the Hongkong Post Office that any modification of detail which necessitates a shelf, a small table, or indeed any place to put anything, has become all but impossible. If the space required is more than a few feet, such a modification is quite impossible.

3. How little the staff of the Post Office has grown with the growing necessities of the service may be seen from the following statement of the *Hongkong* portion of the staff of this Department, in 1875 when the present writer took charge of it, and in 1887, respectively ;—

1875.	1887.
<i>Hongkong Staff only.</i>	<i>Hongkong Staff only.</i>
1 Postmaster General.	1 Postmaster General.
1 Assistant do	1 Assistant do.
1 Accountant.	1 Accountant.
1 Money Order Clerk.	2 Money Order Clerks.
2 Marine Officers.	3 Marine Officers.
2 Chinese Assistants for Marine Officers.	2 Chinese Assistants for Marine Officers.
6 Clerks.	7 Clerks.
3 Senior Chinese.	3 Senior Chinese.
6 Postmen.	7 Postmen.
8 Coolies.	6 Coolies.
4 Boatmen.	4 Boatmen.
35. Total salaries \$20,400.	37. Total salaries \$22,740.

4. It appears from the above that during twelve years there has been an increase in the Staff of two persons, and in the annual expenditure of \$2,340, or not quite \$200 a month. This increase is more than accounted for by the extra money order clerk, by a clerk for parcels, and by the additional Marine Officer. This latter appointment was necessitated, not by an increase in the work, but because it was found to be, in conjunction with the travelling and constant change of climate, too severe for only two officers. Two Marine Officers died at their posts. Even with three, one of whom is always doing three months shore duty, the strain on health is very perceptible.

5. This slight increase in the *personnel* of the Department, obtained, as is always the case, with the greatest difficulty, has been nothing like sufficient to keep pace with the growing wants of the community. Nearly stagnant from 1865 to 1875, this Colony in the latter year took a fresh departure, and has been increasing steadily ever since. Steamer traffic grows every year, new Ports have been opened in our neighbourhood, new mail lines have been established. The French Packets, which in

1875 brought ten or twelve half-empty bags of correspondence, now bring from ninety to a hundred full ones, our largest inward mail in fact, which, unfortunately, necessarily arrives unsorted. In 1875 we had Money Order relations only with the United Kingdom, and the duties were attended to by a clerk who was expected to perform his full share of ordinary Postal work as well. Now we exchange Money Orders with nearly all the world, and the duties are discharged, with daily increasing difficulty, only by the continuous attention of two clerks, who have to be detached from all other duties. Parcel Post has been introduced within the last two years, and, whilst it is most useful and successful, it forms a serious addition to the general work of the Office, and to the daily demand for more space. The total number of letters, papers, &c. passing through the Hongkong Post Office in 1875 probably fell short of 900,000. The total for 1887 is estimated at 2,200,000. The work of the Department is only got through, and that with extreme pressure and difficulty, by long and severe hours of duty, by excessively hard work, and by the superior officers joining in manual labour which, in most other places, would be performed by men at twenty-five shillings a week.

6 But it is when the Chinese Staff of the Office is considered that it is seen how completely inadequate is the provision of hands, in comparison with the work to be done. In the Local or Municipal Post Office of Shanghai; which undertakes nothing but the reception and distribution of local correspondence, and of that exchanged by steamer with certain Ports immediately corresponding with Shanghai, the work is carried on by the following Chinese staff under the superintendence of two Europeans :—

3 Senior Chinese.
17 Postmen and Coolies.
2 Rickshaw Coolies.
4 Boatmen

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The Municipal Post Office at Shanghai is one of seven Post Offices by which the correspondence of that Settlement is dealt with, and it is furnished with *twenty-six* Chinese. The Hongkong Post Office does the whole of the Postal work of Hongkong, inward, outward, and local; prepares and passes on the mails for all China and Japan; acts as a centre between those countries and the Straits, India, America and Australia; sorts both the English and French mails for Shanghai; and is furnished with *twenty* Chinese. The amount of correspondence passing through Shanghai may be taken, with fair accuracy, to be about half of that passing through Hongkong. The whole Postal work of Shanghai is performed by 13 Europeans and 48 Chinese, that of Hongkong by 17 Europeans and 20 Chinese. Moreover the only two really heavy mails for Shanghai are sorted in Hongkong.

7. The Municipal Post Office at Shanghai can, naturally, establish hourly deliveries, and effect them with great regularity and satisfaction to the public. The Hongkong Post Office effects with difficulty three deliveries a day, with an extra delivery after dark when necessary; and, when there is a rush of either inward or outward mail work, delivery has to be suspended altogether, the services of the postmen who should go out with correspondence being indispensable indoors.

8. The directions in which the organisation of the Hongkong Office should now be developed are these :—

- (a.) The improvement of local delivery.
- (b.) The collection of correspondence from steamers, and a quicker landing of contract mails, by means of a steam-launch belonging to the Department.
- (c.) An enforcement of the monopoly of the Post Office with regard to outward correspondence, more particularly Chinese.

The third of these has been waiting for time and opportunity, but the other two are absolutely dependent on the provision of a larger building. Local delivery cannot be improved without a Chinese staff at least double of what we have at present. There is not room in this building for a single additional Chinese. Instead of adding to the existing overcrowding, it should be abated. And it is worse than useless to collect correspondence from steamers unless there are the means of delivering it at least as quickly as the steamer agents can deliver it themselves. Similarly, this Department could not work a steam-launch to advantage without two Europeans to relieve each other in the duty of boarding vessels on arrival. They would have to live on the premises, for which no ingenuity could arrange in the present building. In fact almost every attempt to improve the service in any way is blocked by the same condition, *more room*.

9. To fully develop the internal Postal service of this Colony there will be needed ere long four small sub-offices, viz., one at the east and one at the west end of the town, one at Kowloon and one at the Peak. Pillar boxes will also have to be established at convenient spots on the routes leading to these suburbs. All this would pay its own expenses and more, but it is useless to attempt it without a sufficient central staff to receive and distribute the correspondence.

10. International Statistics, to regulate the payments for sea and territorial conveyance of mails during three years were taken during the first twenty-eight days of November, and, so far as is known up to this date, with regularity and success.

11. The date at which this Report has to be sent in makes it impossible to detail the Revenue of the Department for 1887, which will not be definitely ascertained for some months to come. Probably, however, there will be some improvement on the Revenue for 1886, which was as follows:—

Gross Revenue, 1886,	\$134,734.72	Share of United Kingdom,	\$78,379.82
		Share of other countries,	7,865.91
		Conveyance of Mails,	6,973.12
		Working expenses,	33,136.49
		Balance,	8,379.38
	\$134,734.72		\$134,734.72

12. We have ceased to expect a profit on the working of the Post Office. That there is still a balance to the good is mainly due to the Parcel Post. During the year the following parcels have been dealt with (not including local parcels, of which no separate account is kept.)

	<i>Inward.</i>	<i>Outward.</i>	<i>Total.</i>
By P. & O. Packet,	5,195	3,831	9,026
By German Packet,	215	166	381
	5,410	3,997	9,407

13. The largest Parcel Mail was that despatched on November 8th, the Christmas Mail, by which 329 parcels, weighing 631 lb. net were forwarded. The next largest was that despatched on November 22nd, the New Year Mail, by which 265 parcels, weighing 487 lb. net were forwarded. The largest inward Parcel Mail consisted of 408 parcels, weighing 892 lb.

14. Two parcels were confiscated in London, one for containing reprints of books copyright in the United Kingdom, the other for containing cigars which it was attempted to smuggle under a false declaration. The cigars were addressed to a lady, probably to divert suspicion of the real nature of the contents of the parcel.

15. The exchange of Parcels with the Continent by German Packet is steadily though slowly increasing. At first only four or five parcels were sent or received by each mail, now the average is about twenty. A box containing eight parcels was lost in the *Oder*.

16. The reduction of postage on coast and local parcels effected some time since has been the means of attracting a considerable business in the transmission of such parcels, which are now carried at five cents a pound including Registration.

17. It is hoped ere long to have Parcel Post arrangements in force with the principal Australian Colonies. The Victorian Government, which, as controlling the P. & O. line from Melbourne to Colombo, is the first to be consulted, has accepted the proposals of this Office, and it is hoped that the system may be at work within two or three months. An exchange of parcels by the direct Torres Straits steamers was proposed to Queensland, but the internal legislation of that Colony does not permit of its adoption.

18. A direct exchange of Parcels with Canada via Vancouver has also been proposed. The Canadian Post Office replied that when the mail service between Vancouver and Hongkong has been put on a permanent footing the question will be considered.

19. It has been shown in paragraph 12 that, exclusive of local exchanges, 9,407 parcels passed through this Office in the course of the year. Although the contents of many of these were of considerable intrinsic value, no parcel has been lost, nor has any local parcel been lost.* The reason is not far to seek. Although parcels are not technically considered as Registered Articles, yet practically and to all intents and purposes, they *are* Registered. Persons who talk "the stuff that makes one sad and almost sick," as to how they never register their letters, "it only serves to call attention to them." would do well to consider the fact that upwards of nine thousand parcels, often containing such objects as watches, rings, bracelets, &c., *with the contents and value marked on them*, have been transmitted safely under Registration during the year, whilst it is believed that nearly every letter containing such objects and posted without Registration has been stolen, not necessarily here, nor even necessarily in the Postal service, but still stolen, somewhere.

20. If it were as possible to prevent the sending of unregistered money letters through the Post as it is to prevent the sending of unregistered parcels, letter-stealing would disappear. It is kept up and perpetuated by the persons referred to in the last paragraph, who not only do wrong them-

* Eleven Registered Letters are believed to have been destroyed by an explosion on board the *Formosa* on December 26th.

selves, but also persuade others to do so. If *only* money letters were stolen, the senders might well be left to reap the consequences of their own carelessness, but unfortunately the letters of innocent people are stolen on the chance or on the supposition that they contain money.

21. It may be questioned whether the detective measures taken by many Postal Administrations in the way of sending test letters and laying other traps for Post Office thieves do not do more harm than good. Every time a letter-carrier is convicted, the public begin to think that *now*, at last, they may send money letters with safety. They are soon undeceived. So far at least as Post Offices where the subordinates are Chinese are concerned, it will NEVER be safe to send money or valuables through the Post unregistered, and it is believed to be at once the kindest and the justest course to avoid any useless show of an attempt to make it so. Such attempts only foster a disastrous illusion, and intensify the evil they are intended to cure. To countenance the promiscuous sending of money letters, and yet attempt to put down thefts by detective measures, is like planting a noxious weed, and then snipping at it with scissors. The public have it in their power to cut the weed *at the root* by ceasing to send unregistered money letters. It is believed that the refusal of this Department to make any enquiry into alleged cases of theft of unregistered money letters has reduced that class of correspondence very considerably. If these remarks should deter one additional person from sending money in unregistered covers they will not have failed of their object. And, if they do not deter him, the loss of his money very speedily will.

22. As it appeared doubtful whether the direct route *viâ* Aden for correspondence for the South African Colonies was working as satisfactorily as formerly, experiments were made by the despatch of test covers, as to the real time occupied in transit. The result was as follows:—

	<i>Viâ London.</i>	<i>Viâ Aden.</i>
To Cape Colony,	50 days.	76 days.
To Natal,	57 days.	69 days.

Correspondence for these Colonies is therefore now forwarded exclusively by way of London.

23. In view of the inconvenience caused by the departures of the steamers of the Pacific Mail Company and Occidental and Oriental Steam-ship Company on the same days as the Mails for Europe, the two Companies promised that they would, in arranging their Schedule for the present year, do all in their power consistently with the rules they have found it necessary to observe, to avoid a repetition of this conflict of dates. The good offices of the Companies have been so far successful that, in their Time Table for the first half of this year, there are only two coincidences.

24. It would be very desirable if the occasional despatch of the German Packet on the same day as the French Packet could also be avoided. It deprives the public of much of the advantage of a supplemental opportunity to be obliged to make use of it within a few hours or not at all.

25. The outward French packets now remain here only twenty-four hours, an arrangement causing a severe strain on the strength of this office,* which has only a few hours of daylight to get the whole mail for Shanghai sorted and packed, amidst the numerous distractions always arising from the recent arrival of a contract mail. On one occasion the newspaper portion of the Shanghai mail was unavoidably sent up unsorted. That was on August 4th, a day on which three Contract Mail Packets left this Colony, and two were expected to arrive. Fortunately one arrival did not take place till the following morning.

26. It is feared that, under the new P. and O. contract, the stay of the outward Packet here will also be only twenty-four hours.

27. If the sorting of mails for Shanghai is to be continued under these circumstances, some reinforcement of the staff will be inevitable, but this is a subject which can be well considered when the question of the surrender or otherwise of our Post Offices in China to the Chinese Government is settled. No decision on this point has yet been arrived at by the Imperial Government.

28. It will be necessary to make provision for a re-organisation of the Amoy Post Office in case we retain the control of it. It is impossible to continue working it much longer in its present undermanned condition. The duties of the Postal Agent at Amoy depend upon the incessant and constantly increasing steamer traffic of that Port, and have been much added to by the establishment of direct steam communication between Amoy and Manila, and between Amoy and Batavia. For Manila alone steamers leave Amoy on the average every three days. The Postal Agent has, during the past year, collected and accounted for Revenue to the amount of \$9,403,60. He has sold \$7,837 worth of stamps. He has despatched 5,353 Registered Letters and received 4,831, making a total of 10,184 Registered articles, every one of which needed individual attention and necessitated several entries in books, &c. This gives an average of 28 Registries each day, including Sundays, but sometimes as many as 125 Registered Articles will be despatched to Manila by one steamer. The Agent has dealt

* On Christmas day the clerks in charge of the Shanghai mail were at work from 2 P.M. till midnight, and were required at 7 the next morning for the ordinary work of the Office.

with 325 parcels, and has sold Postal Notes to the amount of \$1,312. He has dealt, without any assistance except that of two Chinese who cannot read English, with over 200,000 articles of ordinary correspondence, say 550 per day, Sundays included. His Office is the point of distribution for Tamsui, Kelung, Taiwanfoo, and Takao, the service of which places involves much correspondence and attention to detail. It can scarcely be thought that \$40 a month is a sufficient salary to pay a gentleman, who has other duties to attend to, for the amount of work, responsibility, watchfulness, and care, involved in keeping up such an Office as is described above. All through the year, we have been continually on the verge of a deadlock at Amoy caused by the not unnatural reluctance of officers of the Consular service to undertake a post the work of which is out of proportion to the pay. Only by the good offices of H. M. Consul in prevailing on members of his staff to take the duties as a personal favour to himself has such a deadlock been prevented. If the Amoy Office continues to be worked from Hongkong it is hoped that its complete reorganisation will be allowed.

29. Arrangements were made, during the year under report, to induce a more general prepayment of the correspondence which it is the custom to send here by steamers outside the mails. The measures taken were necessarily of a stringent kind, but it was intended to relax them as soon as the end in view was attained. This was accomplished before the setting in of the inevitable outcry, which had been all along foreseen by this Department; and the sending of unpaid letters on board steamers was practically put a stop to, and less stringent rules introduced, before any complaint was made. This Office, at any rate, is no longer periodically flooded with unpaid correspondence, nor will the wholesale transmission of such unpaid correspondence through the Post be allowed to be resumed.

I have the honour to be,

Sir,

Your obedient Servant,

A. LISTER,
Postmaster General.

The Hon. FREDERICK STEWART,
Colonial Secretary,

&c., &c., &c.

APPENDIX.

APPROXIMATE STATISTICS FOR THE YEAR 1887.

DESCRIPTION OF CORRESPONDENCE.	INTERNATIONAL.		LOCAL.		TOTAL.	COMPARISON WITH 1886.		
	De-spached.	Received.	De-spached.	Received.		Total in 1886.	Increase.	Decrease.
Ordinary paid letters,	571,000	428,000	65,000	56,000	1,120,000	1,095,000	25,000	...
Unpaid and short paid Articles,	10,000	23,000	2,000	5,000	44,000	46,000	...	6,000
Letters on Postal Business,	1,200	7,000	1,300	1,200	4,400	4,000	400	...
Post Cards,	5,000	3,000	3,000	1,500	12,500	9,900	2,600	...
Do. with prepaid reply, .....	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
Newspapers and Periodicals,	126,000	258,000	37,000	16,000	437,000	412,000	25,000	...
Books, Circulars, Prices Current, &c., ..	210,000	87,000	15,000	11,500	323,500	304,100	19,400	...
Patterns,	5,000	2,000	1,000	500	9,500	8,000	1,500	...
Commercial Papers, .....	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
Registered Articles,	23,000	32,000	3,700	3,800	62,500	58,900	3,600	...
Letters with value declared, .....	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
Registered Articles with Return Receipt, ..	300	5,000	100	100	5,500	4,500	1,000	...
Parcels, .....	...	...	1,000	1,200	...	8,506	...	...