

## THE STORY OF A COVER

I know its been done before and this is hardly a story, not much more than a recital of postal markings, in their probable sequence, but this cover was sitting in the dealers stock, lonely and unloved, dirty, flap and stamp-less ----- and cheap! It took me most of a wet afternoon to decipher even part of it, some say a scanner helps but I hav'nt got one. So this was done with the aid of reading glasses and illuminated magnifier and is not neccessarily correct. Perhaps all those knowledgable readers out there can fill in the blanks and tell the REAL story.

## THE FRONT

It's addressed in a clerkish hand to No. 2972, Private Thomas Bell, 16<sup>th</sup> Company, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, The Buffs, Curragh Camp, Ireland. The 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion were the 3<sup>rd</sup> Foot. The Buffs were the East Kent Regiment, so-called for the breed of chickens, Buff Orpington and Orpington in Kent. (Immortalised for me in Noel Cowards brilliant film of South London life, "This Happy Breed". Stanley Holloway says "Steady the Buffs" to John Mills as they stumble home the worst for drink after a regimental reunion).

A little note on the left hand side "3 months" and "paid" in the bottom LH corner may be in the same hand. The missing stamp, probably a 1d red, was cancelled with a London S CDS for 30/7/66. Curragh Camp is scored out and Shorncliffe is added in manuscript above the address and it subsequently receives a Folkestone CDS for 3/8/66. Both these last are on the Kent Coast, Folkestone is a large holiday resort. It is now endorsed in manuscript across the bottom LH corner "On passage to India" and receives a CDS en route in Cape Colony in November 1866.

After arrival in India, Shorncliffe is scored out and Madras added in manuscript and it receives a CDS of GPO Madras in April 1867. In manuscript again, in the top LH corner is added "something Bengal" and it gets three indistinct strikes of a hexagonal Indore, the only part of the date which is readable is the year, 1867. The clearest of these, in the bottom LH corner again has an upside down black oval "Refused" over it, so presumably it was refused at Indore. The news the letter contained was then nearly a year old and the addressee, if indeed he was ever found, may have thought the 8 annas surcharge (see BACK) too much to pay. Sideways across the centre it is signed Robt. Landon Capt., presumably endorsing the army postmasters manuscript "Not Known" sideways across the RH side.

Finally on the front it receives a red rectangular "unclaimed" on its return to London. There is an unidentifiable CDS beneath the Madras and Cape Colony CDS's. As more was added to the front it must have become quite difficult to interpret on such a small cover, there seems no system for positioning the markings, just any space that was left, and that's just the front! Nowadays the Post Office would enclose it in another cover (I got one the other day, "Please accept our sincere apologies for the damage to this whilst it was in our care". I had not seen "sincere" before, which begs the question, were they insincere before?) In 1866 the cost of the extra cover would rule this out.

## THE BACK

The back is even less clear and the missing flap does not help. First it received a Curragh Camp CDS dated 1/8/66 in the top RH corner, part of which was on the missing flap and then a Folkestone CDS below it for 2/8/66 (one day from Ireland to Folkestone?). Then it gets a red CDS for London on 4/8/66 between them. Now I'm unsure, there is a red CDS for Calcutta dated 13/?/66 in the centre but was this a London mark, because the later blue boxed Calcutta Ship Letter mark is dated MA(rch) 1867? There is blue boxed charge mark I do not understand either, is it "1d Ptg" over "Ship D-1" over "As". An 8 has been added in manuscript making it an 8 As (anna) surcharge, although beneath both 7 and 10 are crossed out! There is a dumb hexagonal for Calcutta on the LH side.

There is a faint hexagonal for Poona dated 26/4/67 in the centre and what might be a very smudged Madras CDS for 8 May in the bottom RH corner. There are 2 faint blue Travancore CDS's, possibly for May and an unreadable CDS dated JY (January) 1868, perhaps when the cover was back in London. There is another red rectangular "Unclaimed" in the top RH corner, beneath a blue mark most of which was on the missing flap but "----ffic-" and 68 can be made out, presumably it was the Returned Letter Office. On the LH side is the lower part of a CDS, the rest on the missing flap, but the year 67 can be seen, perhaps it is another Madras CDS as on the front. And I've just noticed a red "TOO LATE" between wavy lines beside it, whether this was on its original journey from London or later I don't know.

Its surprising how much I have deciphered, despite the poor condition of the cover. I am no lover of mind games (or exercise) for their own sake but this is my hobby. I hope you find it as interesting.