

# The Hong Kong Post Office Royal Arms - A Survey

By Dr. A.M.T. Cheung FRPSL

Hong Kong Island was formally taken possession of for the purposes of a trade station on 28 January 1841 by Captain Charles Elliot, R.N. as Chief Superintendent of Trade for the British Subjects in China. His aide Mr. A.R. Johnston, the Second Superintendent of Trade who was with the government of Hong Kong wrote to the Secretary of the Governor General of India on 24 August 1841 that he had made regulations for a Post Office to be set up. He appointed Mr. F.G. Fitzgibbon to be the Clerk in Charge of the Post Office.

In April 1842, Mr. Robert Edwards was appointed to take charge of the Post Office but he was never given the title of Postmaster. His duty was to co-operate with the Harbour Master in handling of mails in and out of Hong Kong<sup>1</sup>. The regulations of the Post Office were published on 15 April 1842: -

*All mails upon arrival are to be delivered to the Harbour Master, who will have them conveyed to the Post Office. Notice of the intended time for closing any mail is to be given to the Harbour Master who will make the necessary arrangements for having it taken on board ship. The Harbour Master is to be given information to Mr. Edwards of the arrivals, sailings and general movements of the vessels in port, who will cause a notice of the same to be exposed at the Post Office. A general delivery of letters to take place at least once in every twenty-four hours. All Government letters are to be forwarded immediately on arrival. The office to be kept open and attended from 8 o'clock a.m. For the present no charge of any description to be made on letters and parcels.*

Presumably from then on, the Royal Arms Hong Kong Post Office cachet was taken into use in lieu of the local made single-ring Post Office Hong Kong 1841 which gave no indication of sovereignty (Fig.1 & 2). Although not present in the London G.P.O. proof book, the Royal Arms Hong Kong Post Office cachet being a government seal must surely originated from England and seals of similar design also exist such as the *Superintendents of British Trade in China* seal used by Capt. Elliot's deputy Mr. A. R. Johnston on confiscated opium receipt in Macao 1839. (Fig.3)



Figure 1 - Hong Kong Post Office 1841



Figure 2 - Hong Kong Post Office Royal Arms



Figure 3 - Superintendents of British Trade in China cachet

The Hong Kong Post Office Royal Arms cachet was used as a departure, arrival and as well as a transit mark. Out of the 74 letters that I have recorded, one can see that the majorities were addressed to England or India since they were written by military personnel serving with the China Expedition Force. Two big correspondences, in particular the Edwards correspondence to Ceylon and Weston Super Mare and the recent Captain Bruce correspondence to Ireland contained many examples of the Royal Arms covers throughout the period of usage. Covers sent to England often bear the Bombay oval INDIA or the rectangular Calcutta INDIA transit mark in black or red since they were sent by private or H.M.S. ships from the Far East to India where they were trans-shipped to either East India vessels or P & O ships to continue their westward journey. In addition to the "India" markings, a boxed *Postage/ Inward Bearing Ans / Outward do..* Hammond Giles type Bombay SR5 are found on sixteen of the Royal Arms covers between April to December 1843. Detail discussion of the origin and usage of this Indian marking is beyond the scope of this article. Readers interested can consult Lee Scamp's masterpiece<sup>2</sup> "Postal Rate History of China & Hong Kong" and Derek Hammond Giles article<sup>3</sup> on this subject.

The incoming letters bearing the Royal Arms were mostly originated from the U.S. Forbes and Augustine Heard correspondences. There are few letters recorded to France, Siam, Batavia, U.S.A. and only one letter recorded to Italy via England also bearing a British "Detained for Postage" cachet.

The earliest recorded date of use of the Hong Kong Post Office Royal Arms is 20 June 1842 on an entire-letter addressed to E.J.B. Clarke of Cheshunt, England. The letter bears the inscription *China Expedition* which indicates that it was sent by a military personnel serving with the China Expedition Force during the Opium War of 1840. The latest recorded letter is dated 26 March 1844, letter no. 62 of the Edwards correspondence addressed to Weston Super Mare, England.

The Hong Kong Post Office Royal Arms cachet was replaced by the short-lived Victoria Crown Hong Kong cachet (Webb type 5) followed by the 'Paid at Hong Kong' and 'Hong Kong' broken-ring datestamp in 1844 (Webb type 6 & 7).

Half a century after publication of Webb<sup>4</sup>, the number of examples of the Hong Kong Royal Arms jumped from twenty to seventy-four<sup>5</sup>. No doubt, more examples will surface in the near future, as more and more letters from yet unknown correspondence during the 1842 to 1844 period come into the market.

#### Acknowledgement

My thanks to members of the Hong Kong Philatelic Society and Hong Kong Study Circle in particular the indefatigable Michael Goldsmith, Chairman of the Study Circle who keeps good records of almost everything to do with Hong Kong that came into the market. I also need to thank the auctioneers - Spink (Christie's Robson Lowe), Cavendish, Sotheby's, Stanley Gibbons and those private collectors for their permission to reproduce the illustrations.

#### References

1. E. B. Proud, the Postal History of the British Colonies - Hong Kong
2. Lee C. Scamp, the Postal rate history of China and Hong Kong
3. Derek Hammond Giles, India Post - Vol.27 p.152-54
4. F. W. Webb, Hong Kong & the Treaty Ports of China and Japan
5. Update of the Royal Arms listing in September 2014 shows 82 items (81 letters + 1 piece) see listing below

### Hong Kong Royal Arms cover 1842-44 list composed by AMTC (Sept. 2014)

Dep.	Arrival	Origin/destination	Remarks	Ref.
unknown	unknown	Via Marseilles probably to GB	Piece from left side of letter OHMS mail Quality of the strike is circa 1842 (57)	Private (FA)
20/6/42		China Coast to Cheshunt, Herts.	China Exp. EJB Clarke M/s <i>Paid 1 Rp</i> , rated 1s (1)	Scmp.175
	5 /11/42	To Kotta, missent to Ceylon	Via Madras. By ship <i>HC Auckland</i> from China (50)	Private (EB)
5/7/42		Woosung River to Wakefield	HMS Dido Yang-si-Kiang 8d, 1d stamp removed (2)	MG
26/7/42	24/11/42	China to Wakefield, Yorkshire	HMS Dido Yang-si-Kiang 2/8 rate (3)	CZ'87
4/9/42		Ting Hai to London	Cotton. Via Calcutta. Handstruck <b>8</b>	HKSC Jn300
11/9/42	10/4/43	HK to Rome	Via Ireland, detained for postage in London (4)	Private (AC)
13/9/42		Calcutta to Batavia	#148 Duplicate letter pr. Eliza	Burghard/Webb
9/42	12/42	Macao to Somerset	Via Bombay, 2/8 rate (5)	SG84
19/9/42	6/12/42	Macao via HK to London	Boxed Bombay S.L. 3/6 rate, (Horiz. Crease) (6)	Antonia
3/10/42	6/2/43	Chusan to Cheshunt, Herts., GB	China Exp. EJB Clarke, rated 2/8 HMS Thalia (7)	Private Coll.
13/10/42	6/2/43	HK to Ireland via London	Cpt. Bruce #11 "Agincourt at Hong Kong" 2/8 rate (8)	CDH'00/IA 7/09
30/10/42	6/2/43	HK to Scotland	China Expedition, via Bombay 2/8 (9)	SG94
6/11/42		Chusan to Cheshunt, Herts., GB	China Exp. EJB Clarke, rated 3/6	Scmp176
d.11/11/42	Madras 27/12/42	HK to Bangalore re-direct to Darwar	Via Madras, Madras/Ship Letter/Bearing 9As 27/12/42 addressed to Japp 23 Regt. (53)	IA Feb2011 #1373
11/42		HK to Lyon, France	Via Bombay & Marseille. Prepaid at HK 1 Rp, 16 decimes to pay (10)	Lu85
Dec/42	1/3/43	HK to Edinburgh	China Expedition. Handstruck <b>8</b> (11) front & part back	CZ'87 Burghard /Psn
8/12/42		To Madras	China Expedition	David
18/12/42	17/3/43	HK to Weston SM, G.B.	Edwards #44 redirected to London 1s rate	SG97
18/12/42		HK to Ceylon	Edwards #36	EC
1842		Calcutta to China		Webb recd.
1842		HK to Lyons	Via Bombay	Webb recd.
1842		HK to Bombay	Boxed Bombay S.L. Bearing <i>3ans</i> (12)	RLJ10/81
18/2/43		HK to Ceylon	Edwards #38 Madras Ship Letter	EC
20/2/43		HK to Liverpool	Via Bombay, 3/6 rate (tear on the reverse) (13)	CHK95
3/43	14/6/43	Boston to Canton	Augustine Heard corr. Per Steiglitz (55)	Douglass
1/4/43		HK to Ireland via Bombay	Cpt. Bruce #27 "Agincourt at Hong Kong" 1/- rate <i>Postage/Inward Bearing Ans3/Outward2</i> (14)	CDH'00
21/4/43		HK to Ceylon	Edwards #39 Calcutta Ship Letter	EC
9/6/43	9/8/43	Blakeford, USA to Canton	Forbes corr. Prepaid 18 3/4 (15)	MG
14/6/43		Boston to Canton	Augustine Heard <i>per Steiglitz</i> (55)	CDH'14 EL605
	15/6/43	Boston to Canton	Forbes US Consulate <i>per Steiglitz</i> (16)	Lu85
19/6/43		Boston to Canton	Forbes/Russell "Way 26" (17)	CDH'95

20/6/43	23/10/43	HK to Ireland via Bombay	Cpt. Bruce #30"Agincourt at Hong Kong" 2/3 rate Postage/Inward Bearing Ans3/Outward2 (18)	CDH'00
23/6/43	23/10/43	HK to Ireland via Bombay	Cpt. Bruce #31"Agincourt at Hong Kong" 2/3 rate Postage/Inward Bearing Ans3/Outward2 (19)	CDH'00
30/6/43		HK to Ireland via Bombay	Cpt. Bruce #32"Agincourt at Hong Kong" 2/3 rate Postage/Inward Bearing Ans3/Outward2 (20)	CDH'00
18/7/43	9/10/43	Macao to Wakefield, G.B.	From <i>HMS Cornwallis</i> , HK to Yorkshire 1/10 rate (21)	NCY'97/Webb
27/7/43	9/10/43	HK to Drewsbury, Yorkshire	From <i>HMS Cornwallis</i> , HK to Yorkshire 1/10 rate (22)	MG
27/7/43		HK to Ceylon	Edwards #40 Per Steamer Akbar	EC
28/7/43	9/10/43	Canton to Chichester, G.B.	Via Marseilles rated 1/10 Per steamer Akbar (23)	CDH98
31/7/43	9/10/43	HK to Ireland via Bombay	Cpt. Bruce #33"Agincourt at Hong Kong" 2/3 rate Postage/Inward Bearing Ans3/Outward2 (24)	CDH'00
1843	13/11/43	HK to Portsmouth	China Expedition. Via Bombay 1s rate	RH'49, PS
1843	13/11/43	HK to Essex, G.B.	Via Bombay, 1s rate. (Only Chinese style cover) (25)	Wd,TH(2/97)
8/1843		To Saffron Walden, G.B.	From Capt. Hall, 42 Rgt. CEF	Wilde
8/1843	22/11/43	HK to Ireland via Bombay	From B. Mooney, 18 <sup>th</sup> Royal Irish Reg. Rated 2/8 & 4 <i>Soldiers 7 Seaman's letter by Ship handstamp</i> (26)	Yates/Yardley
4/8/43		HK to Siam	Dated Macao 1/7/43 via Singapore (27)	Ishkw#465
26/8/43		Chusan to HK	To 98 Reg. HK Unrated	Lu85
1843		HK to London	Redirected to Leamington (28) <i>Postage/Inward Bearing Ans/Outward do</i>	Dyer 84
1-7/9/43	5/1/44	HK to Ireland Via Bombay	Cpt. Bruce #34,35"Agincourt at Hong Kong" 4/1 rate Postage/Inward Bearing Ans3/Outward2	CDH'00
13/9/43	5/1/44	HK to Ireland Via Bombay	Cpt. Bruce #36"Agincourt at Hong Kong" 2/3 rate Postage/Inward Bearing Ans3/Outward2 (49)	CDH'00
22/9/43	5/1/44	HK to Ireland Via Bombay	Cpt. Bruce #37"Agincourt at Hong Kong" 2/3 rate Postage/Inward Bearing Ans3/Outward2 (29)	CDH'00
24/9/43	15/1/44	HK to G.B.	Pimlico London via Bombay (52) 1s rate <i>Postage/Inward Bearing Ans3/ Outward2</i>	PC40
9/43	18/1/44	HK to G.B.	Banstead Vicarage, Epsom via Bombay (30) 1s rate <i>Postage/Inward Bearing Ans3/ Outward2</i>	Dyer 84
11/43	14/2/44	HK to Bristol	Per <i>Ruby</i> from Singapore 1s rate (31) <i>Postage/Inward Bearing Ans3/Outward do2</i>	Burghard'61
5/10/43		HK to Gateshead, G.B.	Via Bombay, 1s rate (32)	SG94
6-14/10/43	8/2/44	HK to Ireland via Calcutta	Cpt. Bruce #38"Agincourt at Hong Kong" 2/3 rate (33) <i>Postage/Inward Bearing Ans3/Outward2 + Inland 9</i>	CDH'00
27/10/43		Canton to HK	Rev. Dean HK (34) (adhesive tape stain on the left)	Lu85
28/10/43		Bath, UK to HK	To <i>HMS Agincourt</i> (35)	CHK92
5/11/43	14/2/44	HK to G.B.	Edwards #55	EC
8/11/43		Boston to US Consul. Canton	Forbes Corr.	Webb recd.
8/11/43		USA to Canton	Augustine Heard Corr. (36)	Webb recd.
12/11/43		HK to Bristol	By Master of the <i>Ruby</i>	Burghard
13/11/43	8/2/44	Koolunsoo to London	Cotton. Via Bombay 1/10 rate <i>Postage/Inward Bearing Ans3/Outward2</i>	HKSC Jn300
13/11/43	8/2/44	Macao to London	Via Bombay 1/10 rate, (Horiz. Crease) <i>Postage/Inward Bearing Ans3/Outward2</i>	Ishikawa, Canman #552
17/11/43		HK to New York	Large part entire. Rated 6c on arrival Only recorded to USA (37)	Lu85
22/11/43		HK to U.K.	From wreck of the <i>Memnon</i>	RH

30/11/43	2/44	HK to Ireland via Bombay	Cpt. Bruce #40"Agincourt at Hong Kong" 4/1 rate Postage/Inward Bearing Ans3/Outward2 (38)	CDH'00
30/11/43		HK to U.K.		Wilde
1/12/43	14/2/44	To Weston SM, G.B.	Via Bombay 1s rate, (39) Postage/Inward Bearing Ans3/Outward2	Spink'00 H.Giles sale
2/12/43	30/1/44	India to HK/Canton/Manila	Per Rob Roy to HK, Canton to Ph (40)	Scmp.75
24/12/43		HK to Bangkok, Siam	C/o Messrs.Spottiswoode & Connolly/Singapore Unrated (41)	Cranford CHK93
2/1/44	4/4/1844	HK to Ireland via Calcutta redirected to Paris	Cpt. Bruce #43"Agincourt at Hong Kong" 4/1 rate (42)	CDH'00
9/1/1844		HK to Bath, G.B.	Edwards, via Calcutta & Mars 2/3 rate (43)	RLz4/84 SG97
11/1/44		HK to Canton	A Heard. Unrated (44)	SG97
24/1/44	5/5/44	HK to London	Via Bombay rated 2/3 (vert. Central fold) (45)	SG88
	11/5/44	HK to Gosport, Hants	Annotated Via Marseilles rated 1s poor impression (51)	Private (Mo)
5/2/44		HK to Wisbech	Very poor impression	Pearson
6/2/44	17/3/44	Singapore to Macao via HK	"Libois" Macao correspondence (56)	DF May 2014
d. 21/2/44	13/6/44	Amoy to Aberdeen, Scotland	Charles Winchester to James Murray Paid 5as, 1/- rate (54)	IA Feb2011 #1620
5/3/44	11/6/44	HK to Weston SM, G.B.	Edwards #60 Redirected to France (46)	RLz5/88
18/3/44		Manila to Canton	Via HK & Macao per <i>Surat</i> + D/r Br.Govt.Agency Office Macao (47)	Glassco & CDA'90
22/3/44		Koolunsoo to London	Cotton. Redirected in GB with 1d stamp added	HKSC Jn300
26/3/44	8/8/44	HK to Weston SM, G.B.	Edwards #62 <i>Cormandel</i> 1s (48)	EC
				<b>Total 82</b>

### Remarks

The bracketed no. under "Remarks" refers to the scan in database

### Source abbreviation

1. **EC** - The Edwards correspondence, numbered letters to his mother in Weston Super Mare, England or his sister in Trincomalee, Ceylon.
2. **HKSC Jn** - The journals of the Hong Kong Study Circle, London
3. **SG** - Stanley Gibbons sales
4. **RL** - Robson Lowe sales in Zurich (z) or (j) Tokyo
5. **SCMP** - Lee Scamp's Postal rate history of China & Hong Kong.
6. **CHK** - Christie's HK sales
7. **CZ** - Christie's Zurich
8. **CDH** - Cavendish sales, Derby, UK
9. **CDA** - Christopher D'Almada sale by Christie's Zurich 29 Nov. 1990
10. **NCY** - N.C. Yang sales, Hong Kong
11. Other named sales e.g. Percival David, Canman. Giles, Yates, Burghard, Ishikawa, Antonia, W.H. Lu, D. Cranford and George Dyer etc.
12. **MG** - Chairman of the HKSC Michael Goldsmith's record
13. Private collections seen or reported to the author
14. **PC** - Philachina sale
15. **IA** - Interasia Auctions
16. **DF** - David Feldman