

# The Stuart Rossiter Trust Lecture 2022

## The Influence of Military History on Postal History – Anglo French Rivalry in the Caribbean

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# Postal History – what do we mean?

The study of Postal Systems and how they operate

- the routes taken
- the rates
- the markings
- the means of conveyance

Studying and utilising used postal items

Historical Artifacts in fact

Historical Military events impact postal systems in many ways

- Routes are disrupted
  - Rates tend to increase
  - New markings are required
  - Means of conveyance change
- 
- We will all have our own examples and the interest these events add may be why many of us became postal historians in the first place

# The Treaty of Tordesillas - 1494

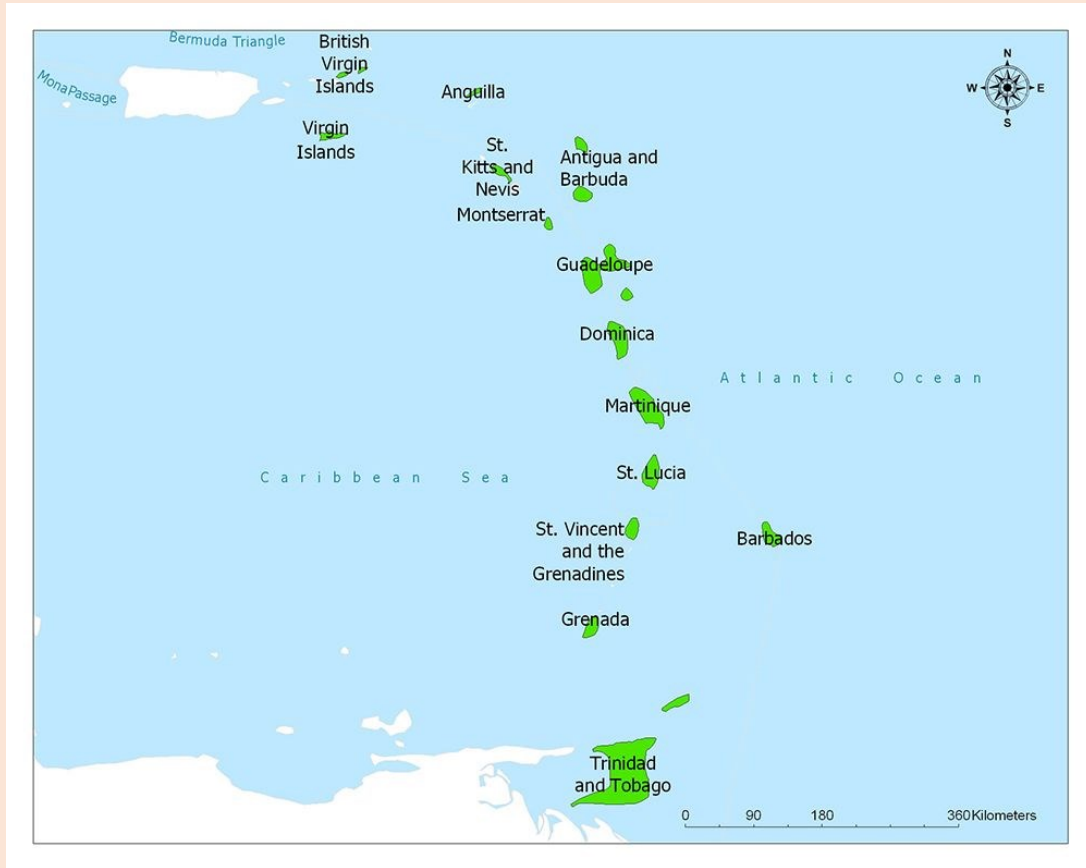
- Spain and Portugal divide up the Newly discovered worlds, down a line roughly half way between the Cape Verde Islands and the islands discovered by Columbus
- The tip of Brazil, when discovered, fell on the Portuguese side. Spain exploits the mainland and larger Antilles islands
- The other European powers do not sign – England, France, Holland



# The Lesser Antilles

- Britain's first colonies

- St Christopher (1625)
- Barbados (1627)
- Nevis (1628)
- Antigua (1632)
- Monserrat (1632)
- Virgin Islands (1650)

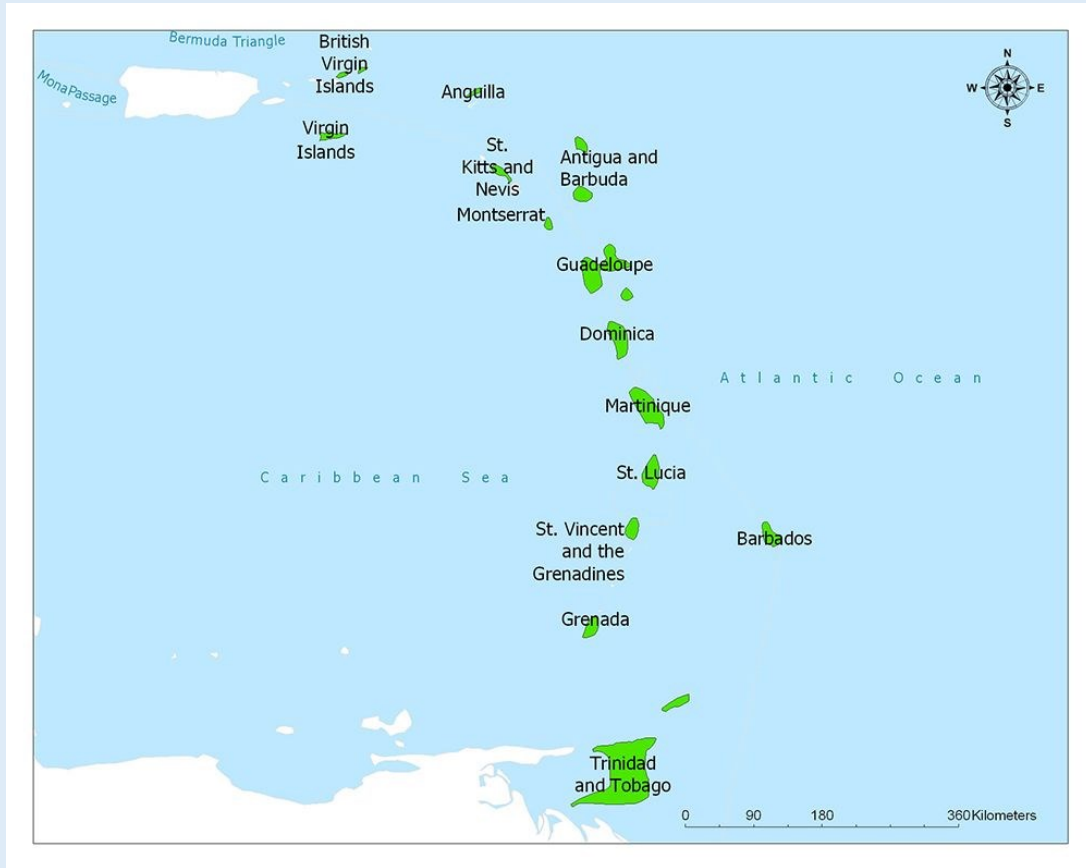




# The Lesser Antilles

- France's first colonies

- French Guiana (1624)
- St Christopher (1625)
- Guadeloupe (1635)
- Martinique (1635)
- St Lucia (1650)
- St Domingo (1664)



# Jamaica & Cromwell



- During the Commonwealth period after the English Civil War, England was at war with Spain from 1654-60.
- An expedition to capture San Domingo failed, but a consolation attack on Jamaica in May 1655 succeeded and England gained her largest island colony in the Caribbean.
- Formally ceded by Spain in 1670

# Early Mail

Early mails were carried by first available ship

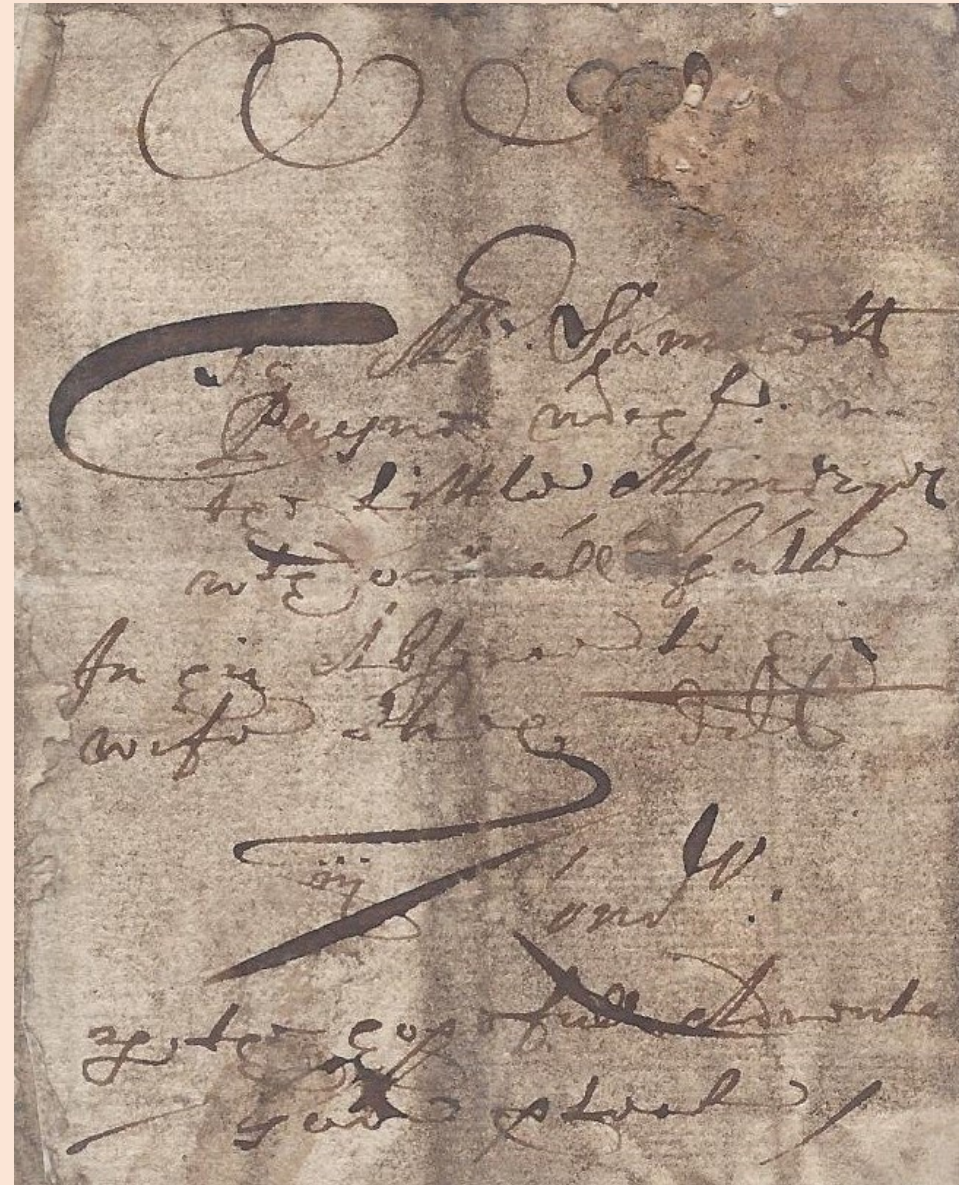
1660 Act requires letters to be handed at the first port of call – Ship Letters, on which a Ship Letter charge was levied and inland postage was due

This 1663 letter from Nevis is to a merchant to his wife, in Little Minories, very close to the area burnt in the Great Fire three years later. Carried by the 'Hopeful Adventure'.

One letter from 1655 from Jamaica survives.

Two letters of 1656 are known from Barbados.

Whilst 1693 is thought the earliest from Antigua.





# War of the Spanish Succession

When Charles II died childless in 1700 he named Philip of Anjou his heir and this was supported by France.

England, Austria and Prussia backed the Austrian Archduke Charles and this led to war

In 1713 Charles succeeded to the Austrian throne as Charles VI, and England stopped subsidising her continental allies, leading to the treaty of Utrecht.

Philip kept the Spanish throne but gave up claims to the French one.

England kept Gibraltar and Minorca and the other half of St Christopher – plus the right to trade with Spanish America.



- Charles II, the last Hapsburg ruler of Spain

# The First Packets

With no postal markings it is hard to estimate how long these early letters took to arrive.

Dummer proposal for a regular packet service with four vessels taking 100 days to ensure security of the mail – fast ships

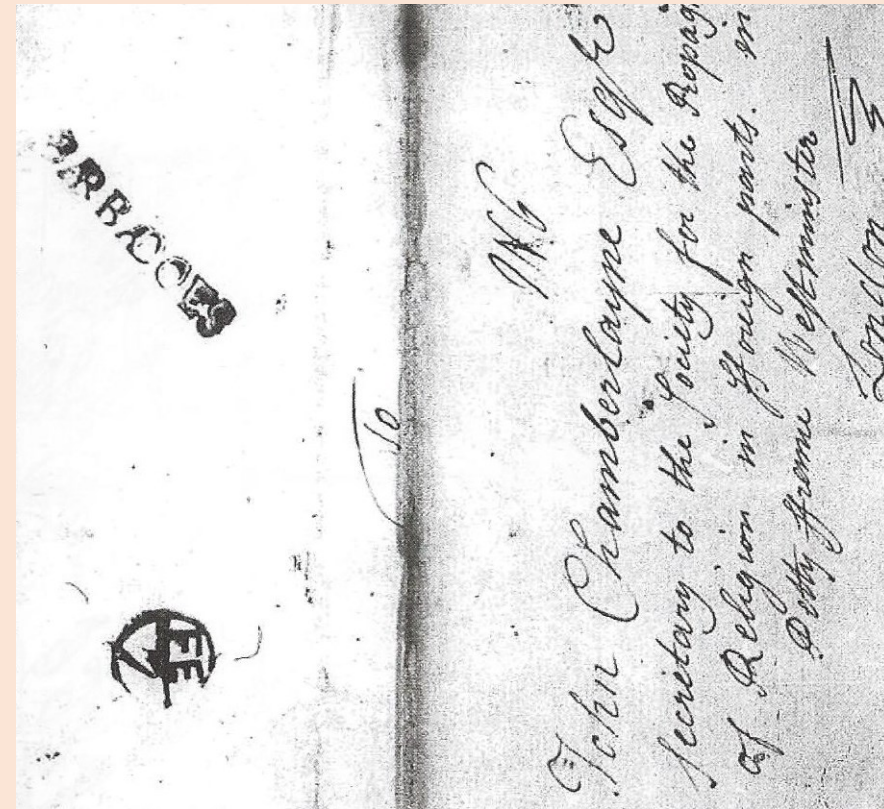
Annual subsidy £9,000 granted. The 'Bridgeman' set out 21 October 1702 and on return voyage carried 1,500 letters.

1703 – 7 voyages

1704 – 6 voyages

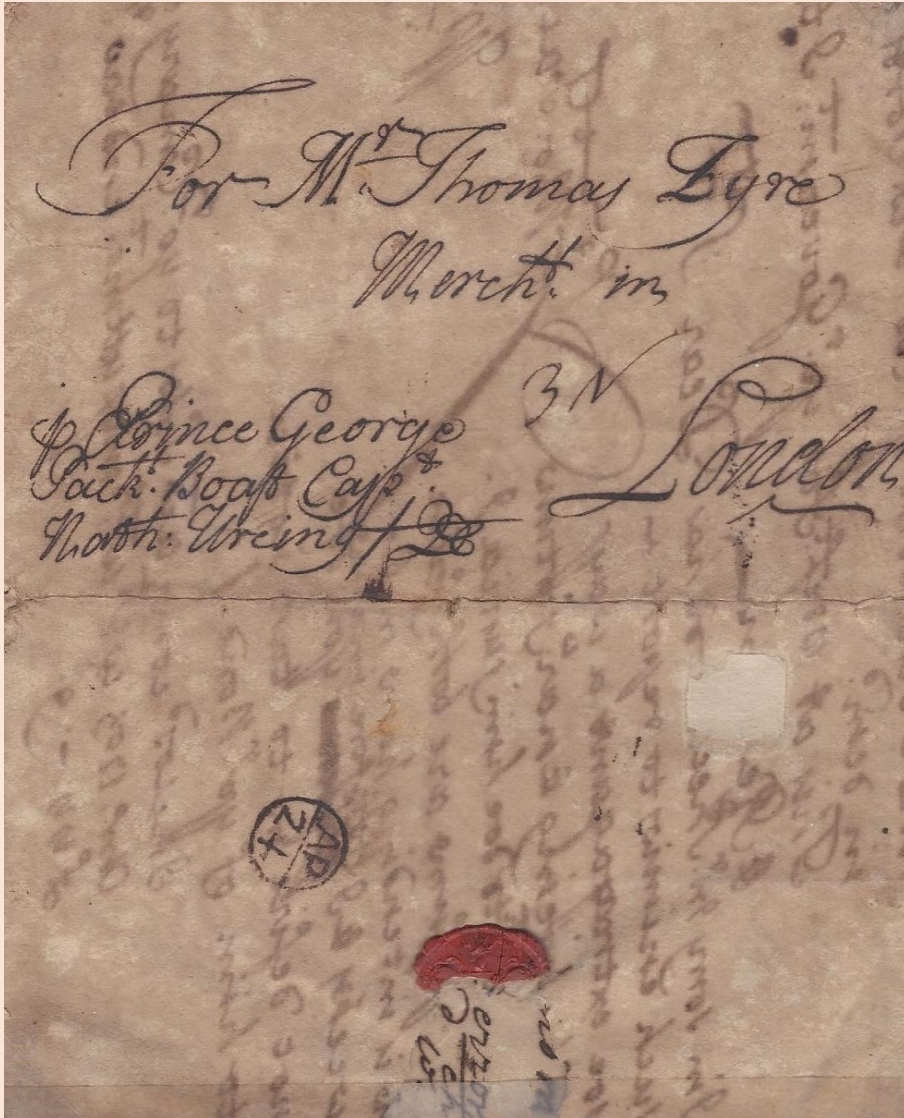
1705 – 9 voyages

1706 – 10 voyages



Letter in Lambeth Palace Archive showing that marks of origin were sent, only Dummer letter from Barbados to survive – 29 October 1706

# The Dummer Packets



- Most surviving letters are from Jamaica (<15).
- 29 Jan 1706 letter to London carried by 'Prince George' rate 3N arrival date stamp – 85 days
- Weather and warfare took their toll, four vessels were lost on their first voyage. Last sailing July 1711
- With peace no incentive to revive the service.

# Early to mid 18<sup>th</sup> century

The Darian crisis of the 1690's and the mini-ice-age in northern Europe led to economic devastation in Scotland and the Act of Union with England in 1707.

Trading rights lead to trading tensions.  
French and English pioneers try their luck on neutral islands such as Dominica

War of Jenkins Ear. Anson's round the world heroics capturing the treasure ship and getting home in 1744 to boost public funds (and his own) – Shugborough Hall



1743 Anson captures the Spanish treasure ship off Manila after sailing round the world



# War of the Austrian Succession

Could a woman succeed to the Austrian throne. Charles VI died in October 1740 and Prussia supported the claims of the elector of Bavaria over Charles daughter.

Britain supported Austria financially but when the French joined the war in 1745 the security of the transatlantic colonies was threatened.

Britain imposed a continental blockade and restarted a monthly packet service as set out in a Post Office notice of 7 December 1745.

The captured Spanish Treasure must have helped.





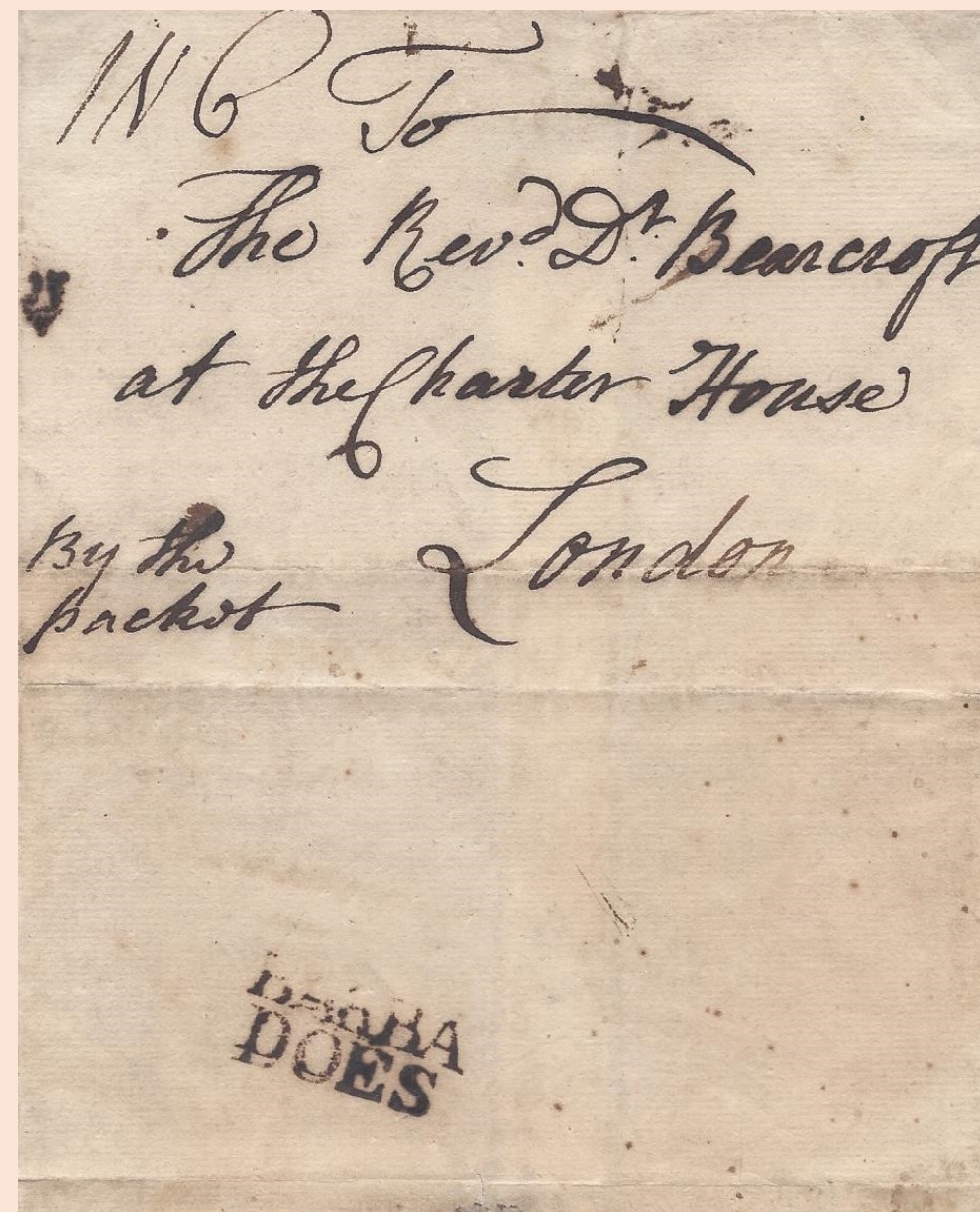
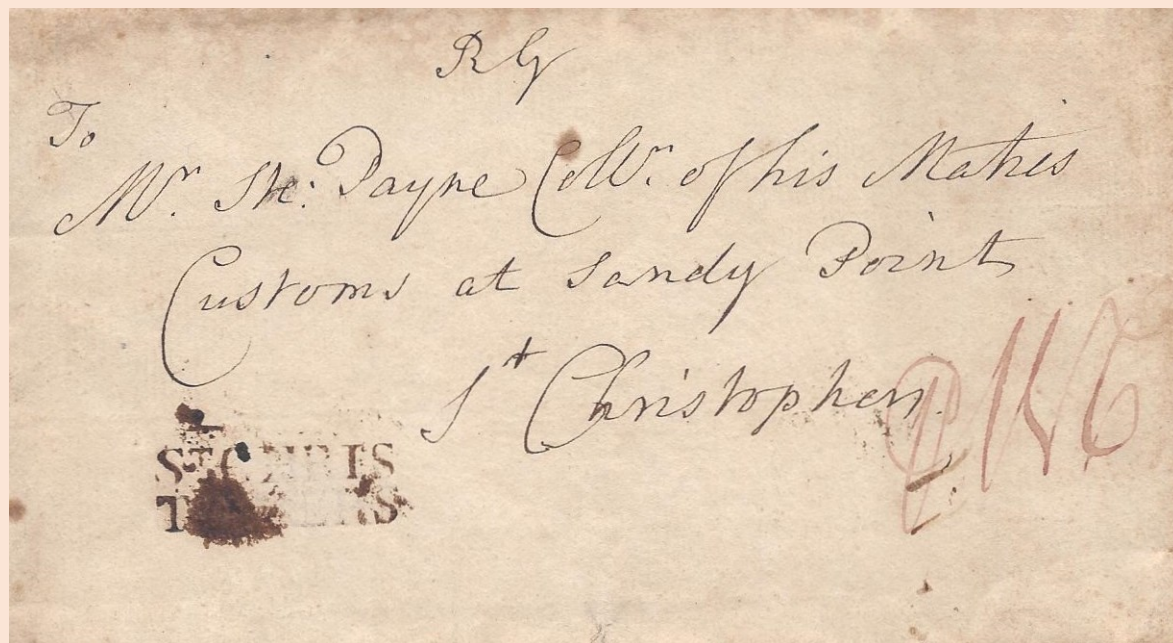
# The second packet service

Letters showing marks of origin have survived for

St Christopher – one

Barbados – a handful

Jamaica - four

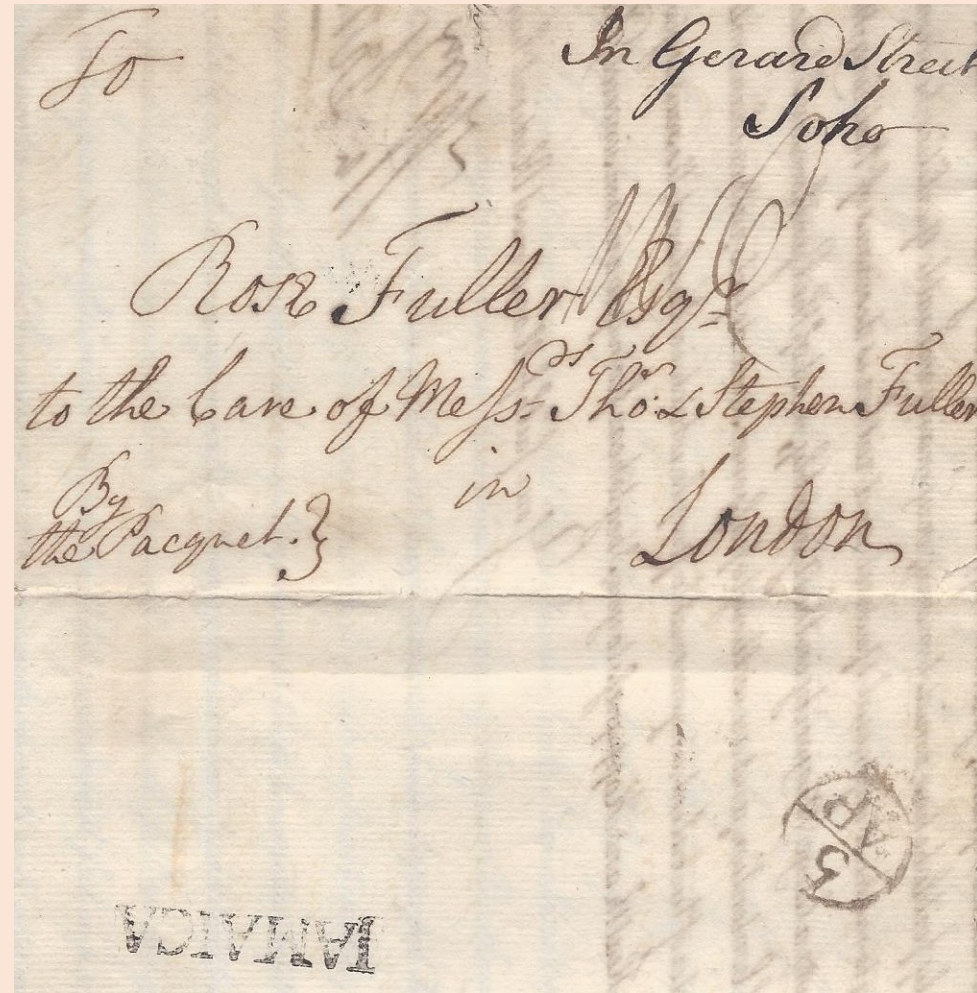


# The second packet service

The cost was 1 N 6 per sheet

Service ran until the peace treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle in 1748

Cost cutting led to transfer of the vessels to the Corunna service in 1749





# Government Packet

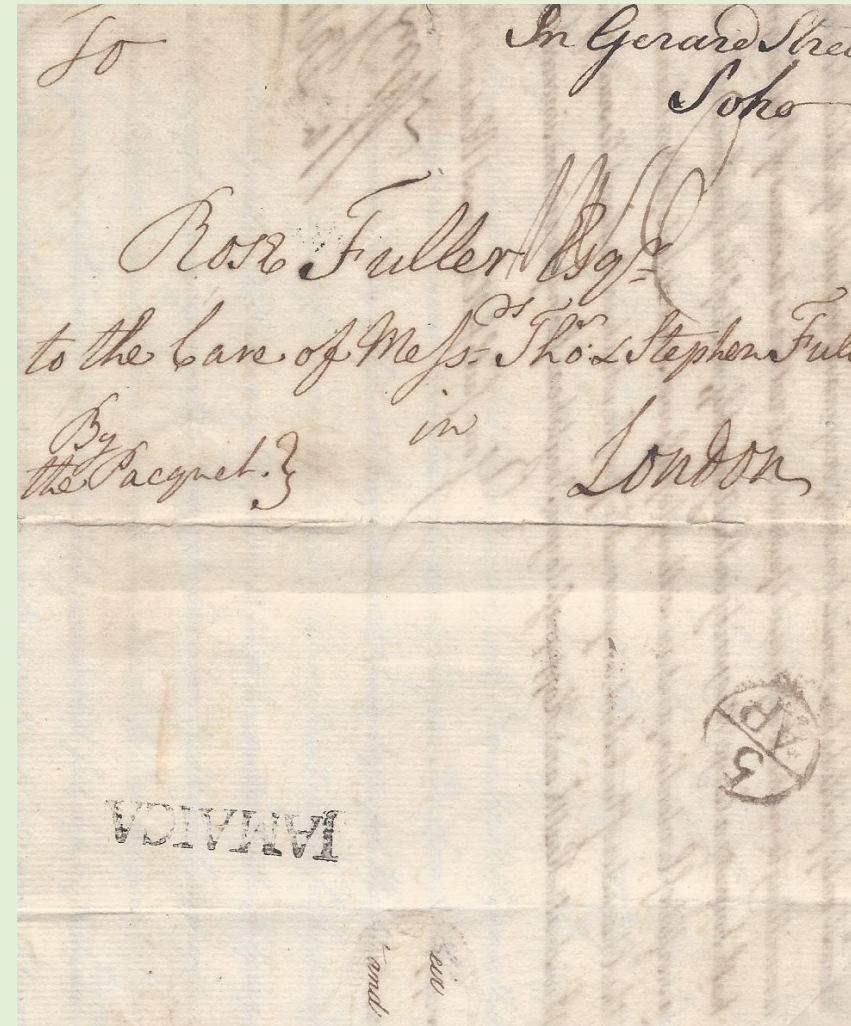
Contract signed 6 November 1755 for 7 years

Ships must be at least 150 tons and British built

At least 16 Officers and men, 8 carriage guns, six swivel guns

Subsidy almost £9,000 per annum, £1,900 compensation for vessels lost to the enemy.

7 January 1758 from Jamaica to London, rate 1N6, arrival 5 April – 88 days in transit – carried by 'New Duke' chased into St Kitts by French privateer



# Seven Years War

Since the 1740's Britain had squadrons permanently stationed in the West Indies, France did not.

The French and Indian Wars started in 1754 and spread worldwide to embrace Wolfe capture of Quebec, Clive's victory at Plassey and many European battles.

Minorca lost early on, Byng executed – 'pour encourager les autres'. French restart West India convoys despite blockade.

1759 Guadeloupe captured. French relief squadron caught by Boscawen off Cape St Vincent and largely destroyed – continental blockade the pattern thereafter

1762 Martinique, St Lucia & Havana captured





JANUARY 7, 1764.

**H**IS Majesty's Post-Master General having been pleased to establish Three Packet-Boats, at Falmouth, of 140 Tons and 18 Hands each, for the Conveyance of Mails, Expresses and Passengers, to Barbadoes, Grenada, St. Christopher's, Jamaica, Pensacola, St. Augustine, Savanna, Charles-Town, and back to Falmouth.

The first Mail will be dispatched from this Office on the 23d of February next; the second on the 12th of April; the third on the 14th of June; and upon the Return of every Packet, Notice will be given, when the next Mail is to be dispatched from hence, which is calculated for once in two Months, or thereabout.

The Postage of all Letters and Packets sent from London, must be paid upon their Delivery into this Office; the Inland Postage to London, from all Places in Great Britain or Ireland, must also be paid, over and above the said Rates.

The Postage from London to his Majesty's Islands in the West-Indies, is at the Rate of 1 s. 6 d. for a single Letter; to the whole Continent of America, including Florida, at 1 s. per Letter, the double, treble and Ounce Letters and Packets in Proportion; the like Rates will be charged in Return, at this Office, upon the Letters and Packets coming from those Places respectively.

All Letters for any of his Majesty's Islands in the West-Indies, not herein mentioned, may be directed by the Way of Barbadoes, Grenada, or St. Christopher's; and if not so directed, they will be left at St. Christopher's, to be forwarded from thence as Occasion may offer.

By Command of the Post-Master-General,

# The Treaty Islands

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- At the end of the War Britain retained vast tracts in Canada and India, France received the Louisiana territory
- In the Caribbean, Britain received Dominica, Grenada, St Vincent and Tobago – the 'Treaty Islands' – Guadeloupe, Martinique and St Lucia restored to France
- The new government packet service was permanent – 3 boats, rates unchanged from the Dummer service 50 years earlier.
- Note the calls in Florida and South Carolina. Florida was another territory awarded to Britain – the war restricted Spanish North America to Texas, California and Mexico



# French packet services

The French also ran a packet service from San Domingo that included Martinique and Guadeloupe

Here we have a letter of 8 October 1772 from St Pierre, Martinique to La Rochelle showing a red 'Colonies par la Flotte' mark in use from 1765 to 1791.

La Flotte is situated on the Ile de Re which is very close to La Rochelle

However most correspondence was entrusted to private ships



# Peace and War

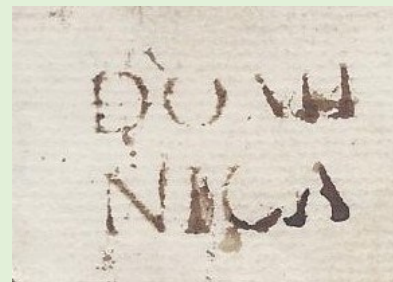
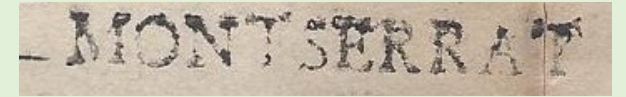
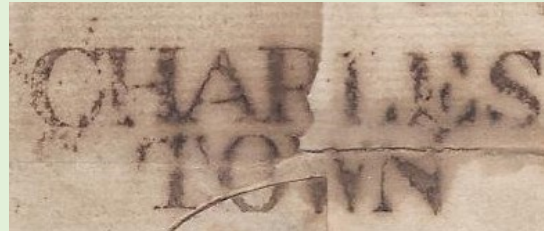
Many new marks of origin supplied to the packet offices.

Antigua and St Kitts handled much of the mail and the devices were soon worn and needed replacing. A myriad of styles can be found.

But the war had been expensive, new taxes were required to pay the debts. The British government thought colonists should contribute to the costs of their defence.

‘No taxation without representation’

The Boston tea party, and the start of the seven year war for independence, which the French could not resist joining in.





# French Success

The War on the north American mainland was the priority for Britain

When France joined the war in 1778 there were opportunities in the Caribbean.

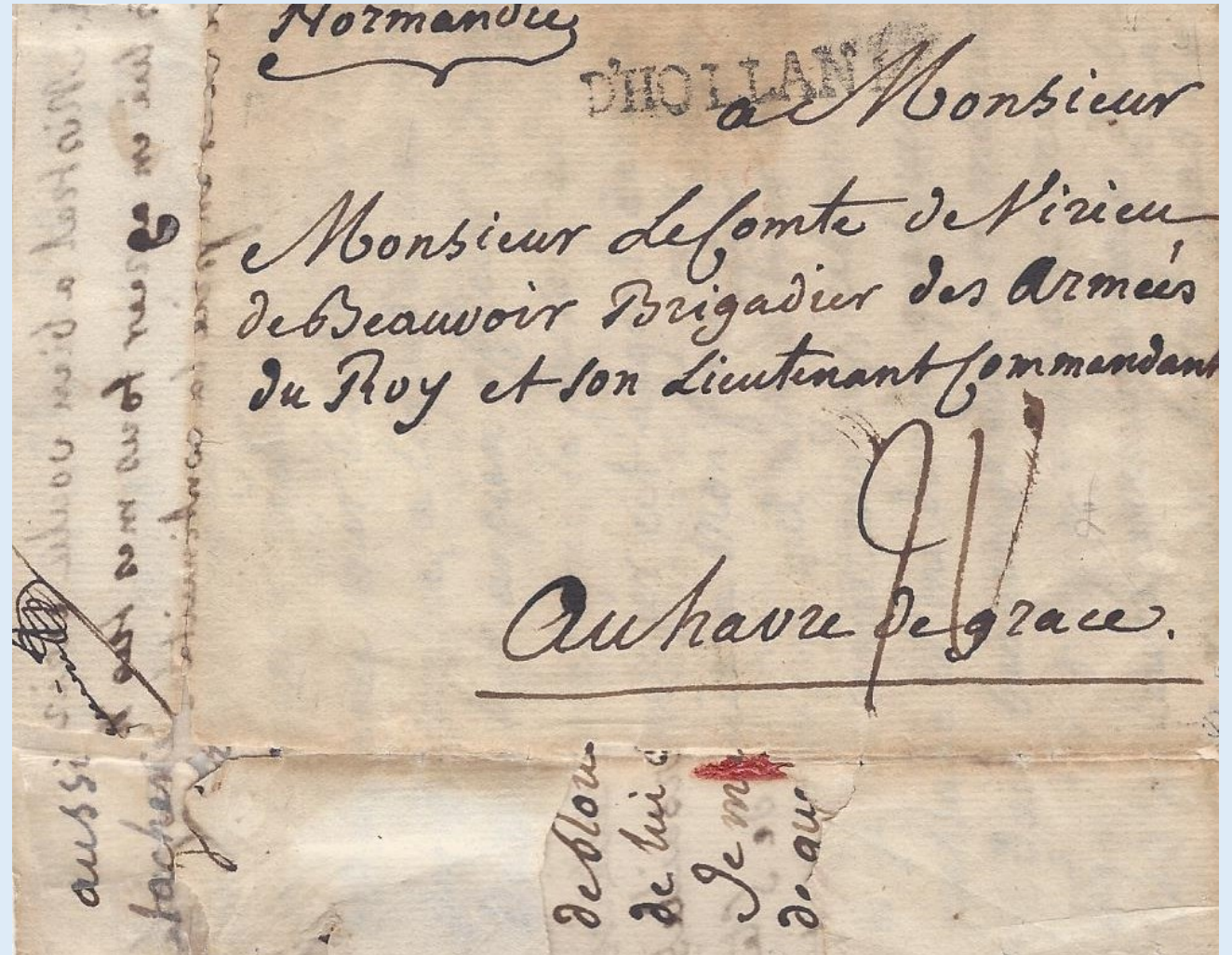
Dominica was occupied on 7 September that year, and occupied until the peace treaty in 1783.

This letter to the Comte de Vissieu escaped the British blockade and entered France via Holland. It is sent by his nephew who was the deputy commander in Dominica.

De Bouille land forces and De Grasse fleet menaced all the British possessions.

Rodney's decisive victory at the Battle of the Saintes April 1782 – the Battle of Dominica to the French

24 British packets were captured 1777-1782 – almost





# A fortnightly service plan

Notwithstanding the war losses the service steadily improved.

1777 – 1779 – monthly sailing, 12 p.a.

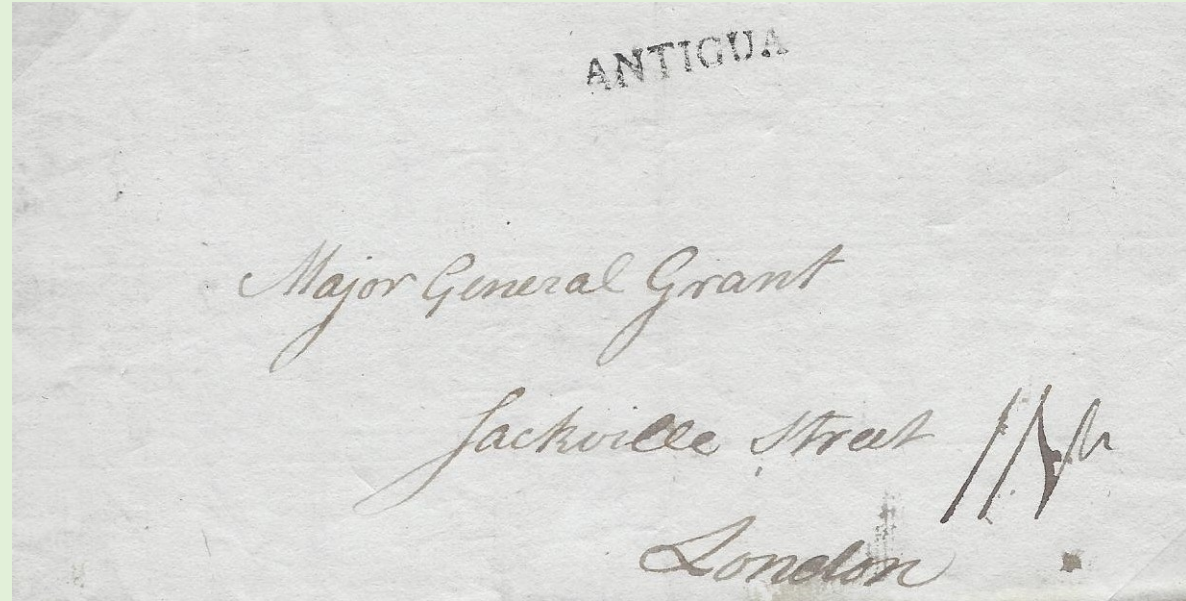
1780 – two packets, one sails for Jamaica, one for the Islands – 15 sailings

1781 – 18 sailings

1782 – 20 sailings

1783 – 22 sailings

Sufficient sailings to introduce a fortnightly service, if it can be supported by local mail boats



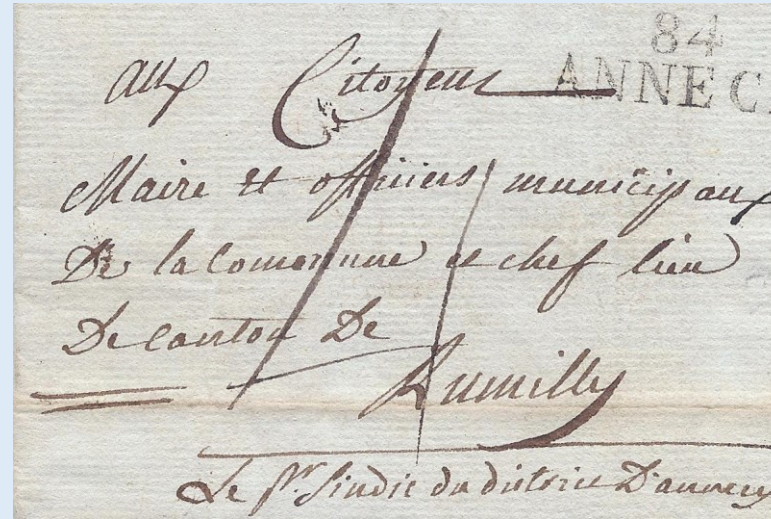
Letter from James Lumsden in St Lucia dated 14 Dec 1782 to General Grant in London, entrusted to packet in Antigua. St Lucia was captured by Britain in 1778 and restored to France at the peace. 29 Jan arrival mark, shows 46 transit.

# Revolution

A letter with the seal of the public prosecutor  
to the citizen mayor of Rumilly

Symbolic of the times, sent from one of the  
Department Conquis on 11 Brumaire Year III  
– 1 November 1794.

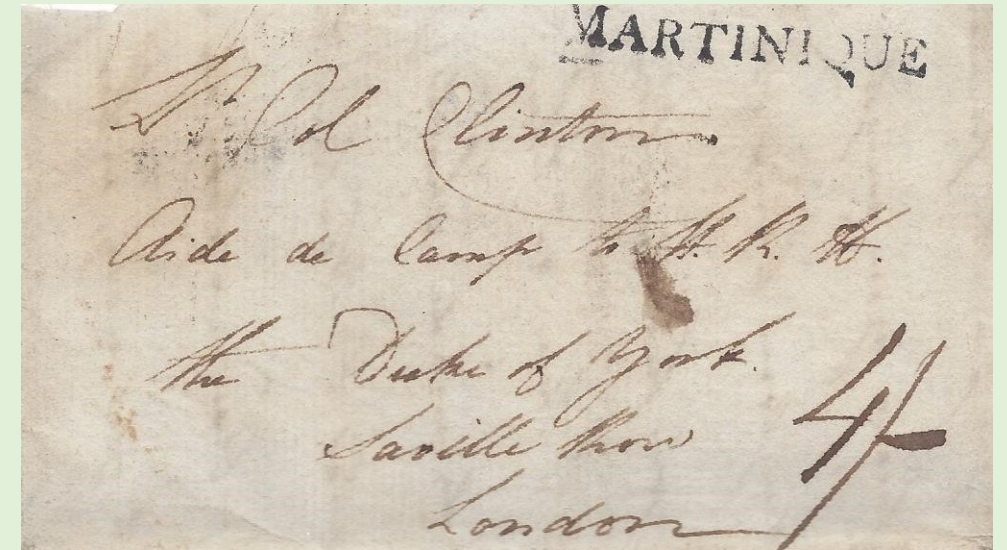
A letter with a 'flavour' of the times



# Martinique

A letter from June 1796 at the quadruple packet rate of 4s from Henry Clinton writing to his brother who was ADC to HRH The Duke of York – Britain's commander in Chief from 1798 to 1809

It shows the swift addition of Martinique to the packet route and the introduction of British marks of origin





# Price rises

2 December 1796 entire from St Kitts

Yet another new hand stamps of origin, this the Earliest yet discovered.

It arrived on 14 January, after the 4 January change so the packet rate of 1/- has been struck through and replaced with 1/8 to include the 8d inland postage from Falmouth to London.

This continued to be a dangerous time for packet ships and 17 were captured between 1798 and 1800.



Grenada introduced a fancy Crown mark



# Insurance Fraud

Despite the hostilities innovations continued to be made.

In October 1798 Lloyds received a claim for a lost ship and were of the view that the policy had been taken out only after the policy holder knew the ship had foundered.

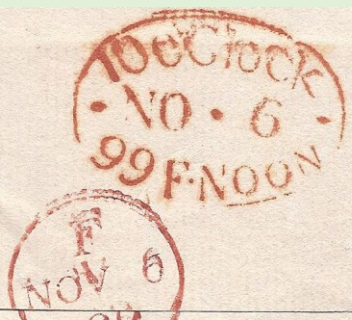
Francis Freeling took this up as a matter of urgency and the first date stamps to be sent out went on the November packet.

This cover shows the earliest date stamp recorded from anywhere in the Caribbean and also the village mark of Falmouth, Jamaica.





PORT ROYAL  
SEP 4-99



MARTINIQUE  
APR 21-99

Col. Ch. de la Feltre.  
Ac. de

St. Pierre.

BARRADOES  
SEPT 89

Hugh M. Calmont Esq. 3/4  
Care of  
Messrs. Buillie Thornton & Campbell  
Merchants  
London

Andrew Steele Esq.

Writer to the Signet

Edinburgh

DOMINICA  
SEP 9-99

VINCENT  
JUN 7-98



20 Janry 1800  
of the Captivity  
George & capture  
American, with

Other 1799 date stamps



# 1d Soldier's rate

May 1801 letter from Simon Prior sent from Dominica to Dublin at the soldier's concessionary rate of 1d, approved at the top left by an officer.

Note the packet office date stamp is now in the YYYY format.

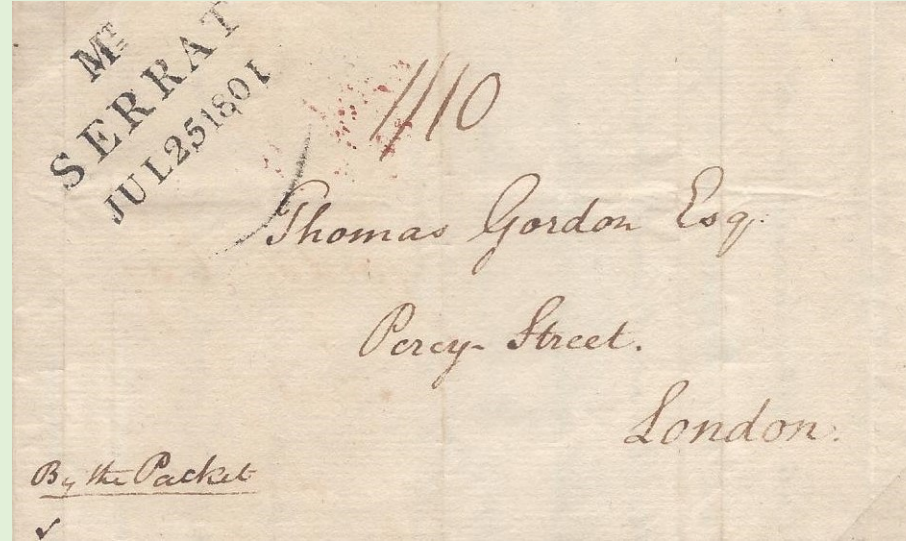


# Price rises and Horseshoes

Until 5 April 1801 British inland postage was 8d over 150 miles, then the mileage bands were reformed, so that Falmouth to London now cost 10d.

Montserrat had a three line date stamp, that may have been fragile as it was replaced by a horseshoe date stamp in 1804.

The horseshoe design also came in to use in several British post towns as pressure for more general use of date stamps rose.





# Other Horseshoes

Only two other offices received a horseshoe style date stamp – Demerara and Trinidad.

Trinidad had been awarded to Britain at the Treaty of Amiens signed on 25 March 1802 and the only year of peace until 1814.

Demerara had been restored to the Dutch at this time, but was re-occupied in September 1803.

A three man commission, including Admiral Hood and General Picton were sent to govern Trinidad and my conjecture is that they took these date stamps with them when they took up their posts at the start of 1804.



# Treaty of Amiens

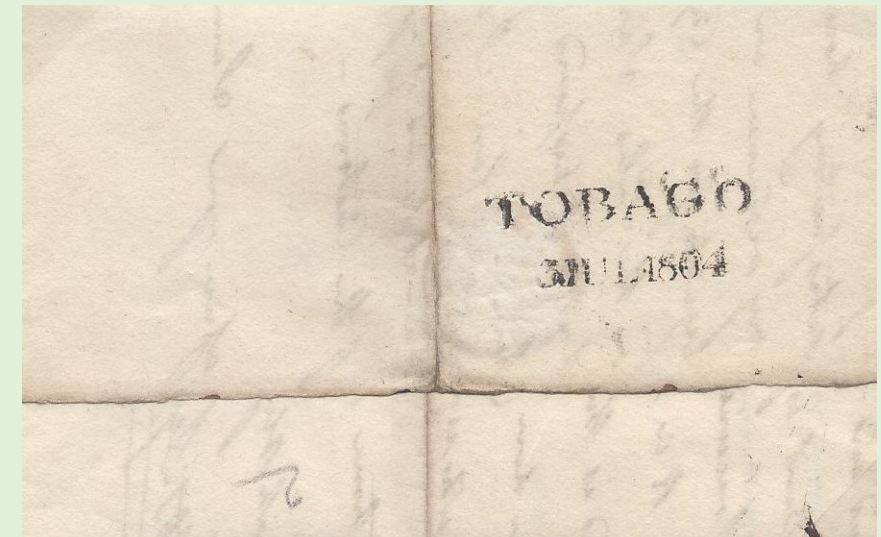
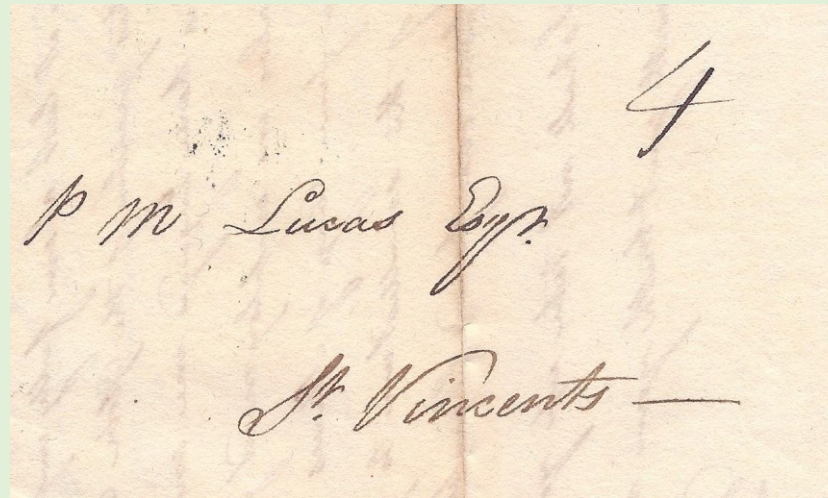
Tobago had been captured by Britain in 1793 and it had received a Freeling style date stamp.

Restored to France by the Treaty of Amiens, it is debateable how far French postal arrangements returned.

Britain declared war in May 1803 and re-occupied Tobago on 30 June.

The Freeling date stamp was still available so no 'horseshoe' was issued.

Front and back of a letter from Surinam to St Vincent, put in to the packet office in Tobago in July 1804 at the 4d interisland packet rate that lasted from 1710 until UPU.





# Large Fleurons

Introduced in 1805, no record in the date impression books.

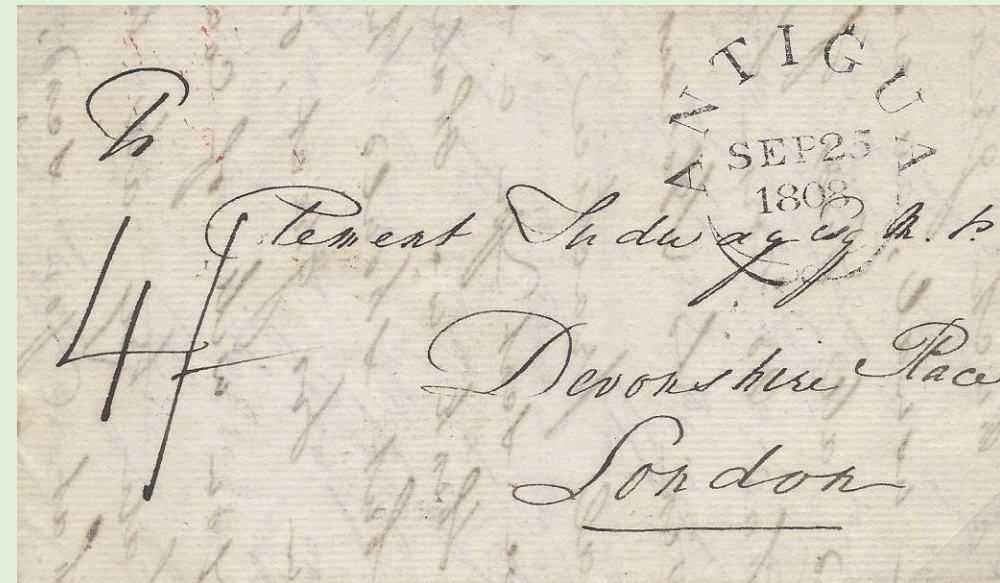
Earliest uses:

1805: Jamaica, St Kitts, St Vincent, Tobago

1806: Dominica

1808: Antigua

Increase in rates from start of 1805. Packet rate 1s 1d, Falmouth to London 11d. So 2/- per sheet, double rate here from Antigua.



# Danish territory

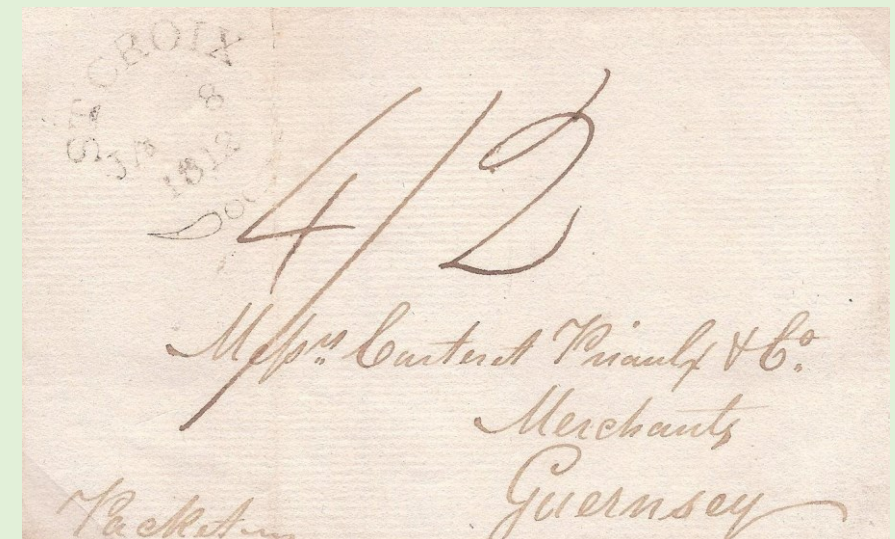
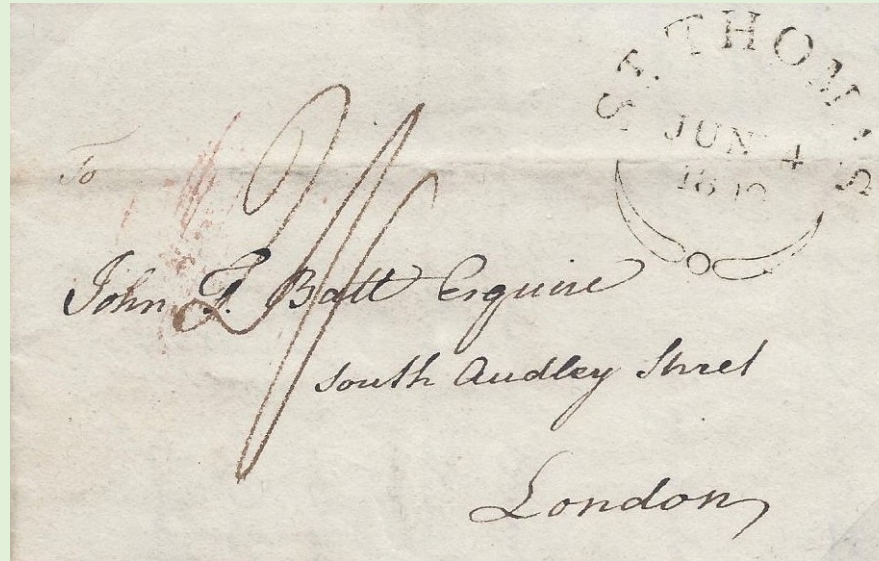
Denmark was forced to align with Napoleon in 1807.

Britain occupied the Danish West Indies as a result and fleurons were issued to the offices opened at St Thomas in 1809 and St Croix in 1811.

The St Croix cover shows a further increase in the inland postage in 1811 and it now cost 1s from Falmouth to London, so 2s1d for a single sheet 4s 2d double.

St Thomas remained an important packet office for much of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Fleurons were not issued for the occupied French islands of Guadeloupe and Martinique but were for the Dutch colonies of Curacao, Surinam and St Martin





# Dutch Territory

Britain captured the three Dutch colonies of Demerara, Berbice and Essequibo in 1803 and retained these at the peace of 1814, they were united in to British Guiana in 1831.

Surinam was occupied in 1799 but returned in 1816.

The island of Curacao was captured in 1807 and returned in 1814.

Fleurbaey sent to both when added to the packet route.



28 January 1813 packet letter to London triple rate at 6s 6d. |  
Jan 1813, a further increase in the packet rate to 1s 2d, inland  
postage 1s, so  $3 \times 2s\ 2d = 6s\ 6d$

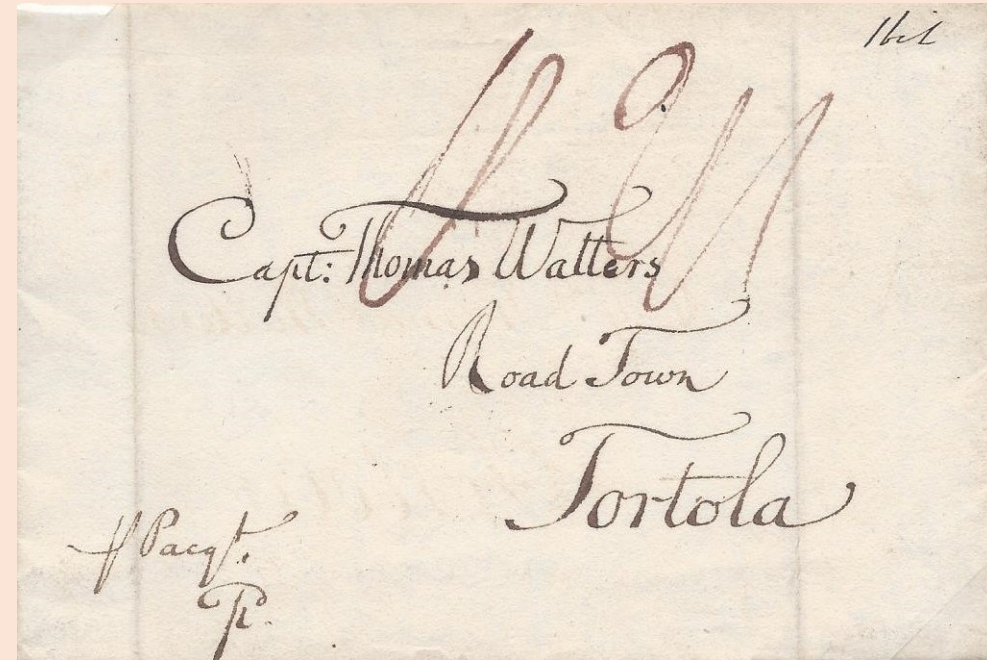
# Mutiny on the packets

Packets were supposed to outrun opponents and so were not heavily armed and the contract banned cargo.

In practice 'perquisites' were connived at, and when a new zealous officer clamped down on these the crews mutinied.

The authorities retaliated by setting up a service at Plymouth which lasted from October 1810 until 15 February 1811, when the packets returned to Falmouth

Cover to the right sent from Liverpool to Tortola on 4 December, clearly marked per pkt and sent for 2s 1d, is a scarce item from this period.





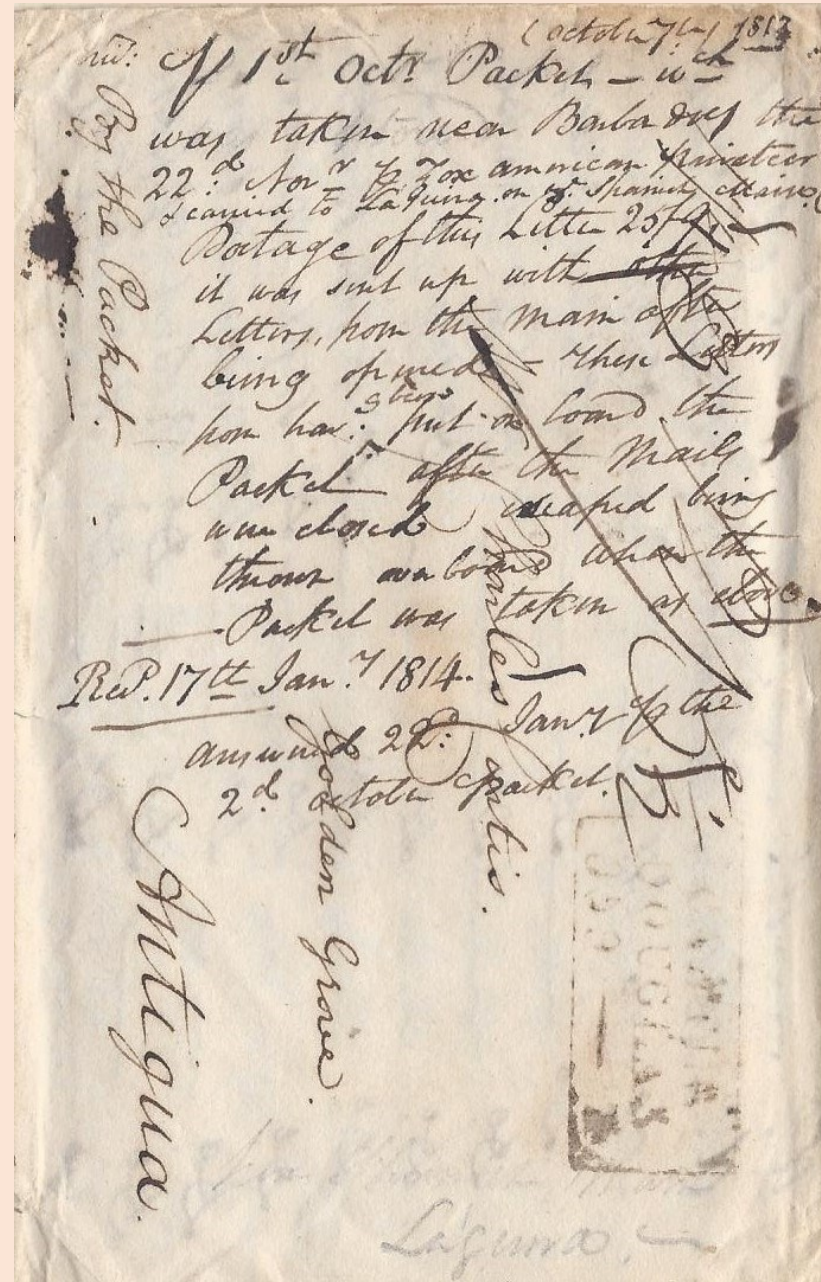
# Privateers

After Trafalgar, privateers were the main threat to the packet, many of them American.

The instructions were that the packet should be weighted and thrown overboard at the last moment if capture looked inevitable.

This happened on this occasion but this lost letter survived for the benefit of postal historians.

See the lengthy inscription reproduced at the right.



“pr 1<sup>st</sup> Octr Packet – which was taken near Barbadoes 22 Novr. By “Fox” American Privateer and carried to La Guaira on Spanish Main. Postage of this letter 25/9 it was sent up with other letters from the main after being opened – these letters from Harsberg put on board the Packet after the mail was closed escaped being thrown overboard when the packet was taken as above. Recd 17 Jan 1814 answered 22 Jany by the 2<sup>nd</sup> October packet.”

# War with the US

The postal historian inspects the contents!

This letter of 8 October 1813 was written by an artillery officer to his wife, the day after his battery had supported Wellington's forces crossed the Bidassoa in to France itself.

Once the allies imposed peace on France and Napoleon was exiled to Elba, British forces were free to focus on the United States. It was Mitchell's Congreve rocket battery that destroyed the White House.

The officer John Michell rose to the rank of Lieutenant General and was knighted.





# Napoleon



Just his name was enough to cause panic.

Restricted to Elba in April 1814 after the fall of France, Napoleon landed in France in February 1815 and the forces sent to capture him came over to him and so embarked on the road to Waterloo.

When the news reached the Caribbean it caused panic, Martinique and Guadeloupe both thought to favour Napoleon.

Of course by the time it arrived he was now a guest of the British Government.



Letter handed in to the packet office in Dominica on 24 May 1815 but then placed on a warship and landed at Portsmouth as a Ship Letter. 3s 4d plus wheel tax.

# Conclusions

To quote the Prussian Field Marshall Gneisenau –

“There is no mortal to whom Great Britain has greater obligation than this blackguard (*Napoleon*) for it is the events which he has brought about which have raised England’s greatness, security and wealth so high. They are lords of the sea, and neither in this domain nor in world trade have they any rivals left to fear”.





# Conclusions - routes

The naval success of the Napoleonic wars lead to the mail from the entire Caribbean basin to be carried to Europe most speedily on British packets.

British Postal Agencies provided fast access to Europe right through to UPU in the 1870's and 1880's.

- Voie d'Angleterre
- Via D'Inghilterra (Inglatera)





# Conclusions - rates

Military operations are expensive

Packet rate from island to London

1765 – 1s	inland included
1797 – 1s 8d	1s pkt, 8d inland
1805 – 2s	1s 1d pkt, 11d inland
1813 – 2s 2d	1s 2d pkt, 1s inland



Only in 1840 does postal reform cut the rate to 1s and no additional inland charge.

1840 new rates, new date stamps, the coming of steam.

# Conclusions - markings

Changes to markings brought about by military operations add greatly to postal history interest.

Changes of control

Designation of routing

Certainty provided by date stamps

New trade patterns follow military events requiring new routes and services.

Thank you for listening



Guadeloupe 1810  
mark used by Britain  
during 4<sup>th</sup>  
occupation

Martinique  
octagonal mark  
introduced in 1810  
during 3<sup>rd</sup>  
occupation

