

## 2. OVERVIEW OF NATAL AND ZULULAND POSTAL HISTORY.

From the earliest times postal authorities applied marks to items of mail confirming that postage had been prepaid. Initially manuscript endorsements with place name and amount of postage paid were used, followed by official post office type cancellations often dumb. With the introduction of postage stamps postal authorities were concerned that the cancellations on stamps could be cleaned and the stamp then re-used by the public thereby defrauding the postal department. They therefore designed distinctive cancellation marks with either a numeral or the place name, as well as an ink that was difficult to remove from the stamp was used. The time taken for the mail to be transferred from its post office of origin to its destination became increasingly important especially for government official and commercial users. The need therefore for dated marks resulted in a wide variety of postmarks and cancellation types as trials and experiments were undertaken. Is there a difference between a postmark, cancellation or obliteration marks? Most collectors regard postmark and cancellation as synonymous but these can be defined differently. A 'postmark' is a mark stamped upon a letter at a post office, defacing the postage stamp and or showing the place where it was applied or of its arrival. A 'cancellation' is any kind of defacing mark applied to a stamp to prevent its re-use, and includes pen-marks, rubber stamp impressions and postmarks. An 'obliteration' is a term generally applied to a heavy defacement such as impressions made by barred and cork cancellers.

Natal like many other countries, experimented with differently designed cancellers from about 1850 to 1880. As a basic shape for a postmark handstamp the ubiquitous circle has endured in use from the 1850s to the present day. It is the most common type seen either as a single or double ring circular date stamp.

### Pre-adhesive handstamps.

The earliest Natal mail had no postal marks and was carried either by runners between mission stations established by various missionary organizations from the 1830s, by military personnel between Pietermaritzburg and Port Natal, by a private post service run by the *Natal Witness* newspaper in 1846, or by favour of the masters of vessels calling at Port Natal.

The first officially designated post offices came about in March 1850 and a postal route connecting D'Urban, Pietermaritzburg, Bushman's River and Klip River was established. Although post masters were appointed they were not issued with devices to mark the mail. In late 1850 post offices were established at Richmond and Pine Town followed by Verulam in 1851. With the promulgation of Ordinance No. 4 of December 1851 improvements of the post service in Natal followed. Prior to 1852 no marks attributable to the Natal Post Office have been seen. The need for the post office to officially mark the mail to confirm that postage had been paid resulted in the first hand stamps being issued in August 1851. These are the first marks applied to the Natal mail and were a boxed italic *PREPAID* mark followed later by oval town stamps without date components for Pietermaritzburg and Ladysmith (Dickson 1999). The Ladysmith town mark is very rare (Fig 1). The D'Urban marking has never been found on a prestamp or stamped letter but two examples have been found on embossed stamps. John Dickson suggested that the town stamp for D'Urban was possibly suppressed by the postmaster because he was unable to insert the date. Earlier opinions (possibly unlikely) were that it is a forgery.



Fig 1. The early PREPAID hand stamp (type P.S.1) and the rare Type A hand stamp used at Ladysmith (ex HKL).

In 1852 a boxed 'PAID' and 'TO PAY' hand stamps (HKL Type P.S.2 & S.1) were issued at the Pietermaritzburg and Durban post offices (Fig 2). Pre-payment of postage was compulsory in Natal (on 21 June 1859, Dickson 1999) thus the 'TO PAY' mark is found on inward covers that were deficient in postage. Different versions for Durban and Pietermaritzburg 'PAID' hand stamp are usually found on mail addressed locally rarely with an endorsement in sterling confirming the amount that had been paid. Other post offices continued to process the mail and would endorse a letter with the place name and amount of postage paid in manuscript. Only three such item have been seen (i.e. for Ladysmith, Pinetown and Woodside).



Fig 2. The 1852 PAID hand stamp (Type P.S.2) and the TO PAY (Type S.1) hand stamp (ex HKL).

During 1853 the Natal press called for reform of post office practices in their executing the stamping of letters, in particular *'the date of their receipt'* should be indicated for both sea borne mails and internal communications. The need was to determine where delays in delivering the mail were occurring. Late in 1853 a 'small crown / NATAL' hand stamp (HKL Type B) came into use at D'Urban; the year date being excluded from the stamp (Fig 3). This hand stamp was regularly used on inland mail and outward sea mail until 1860-61.



Fig 3. The crown / NATAL hand stamp used at Durban (Type B), (ex HKL).

#### **Cancellations on the embossed stamps.**

1857 saw the issue of embossed stamps for prepayment of inland postage. The stamps were not valid to pay postage on sea mails, except that they were variably accepted for payment of sea mail to Cape Town. The types A and B town marks were used; the P.S.1 and P.S. 2 were not used with the exception of type P.S. 2 which was temporarily used in 1861 coinciding with a shortage of Chalon stamps. However, post offices at several other towns operated but had not been issued with devices to cancel these stamps. In this event the postmaster cancelled the stamp in manuscript often using either an 'X' or the name of the town. Most commonly seen is the 'Umhlali' cancellation but other manuscript marks have been recorded for BMR (Bushman's River), Greytown, L (Ladysmith), Little Tugela, Pinetown, Richmond, RR (Richmond Road), Umzinto, Verulam, and Weenen. From June to September 1857 a circular mute cancel having eight rows of diamond shaped spots (HKL Type D) was used at Pietermaritzburg in combination with the town A.1 oval cancel (Porter 2021). It was used for a short period only from June to September 1857 (Fig 4). This cancellation has been variously described as a 'grille' and 'retta' mark.



Fig 4. Type D mute obliterator used for about four months in 1857 at Pietermaritzburg.

#### **The first date-stamps and barred numeral obliterations.**

In June 1860 the post office in Pietermaritzburg received 24 obliterating hand stamps numbered 1 to 24 (HKL Type G) and 21 double circle town date stamps with the date in numbers and letters (HKL Type F). These were supplied by Messrs DG Berrie, Bloomsbury, England (Dickson 1996). The date stamps included a small imperial crown above the month-day date with the year date below. They were described by HKL as neat and attractive (Fig 5). Interestingly the spelling of some towns was with a hyphen (e.g. Pieter-maritzburg, Lady-smith, Pine-town, Sterk-spruit). However these date stamps became over inked and worn particularly those used initially at D'Urban (sic) and Pieter-Maritzburg (sic) and were replaced with similar but slightly differently designed date stamps.

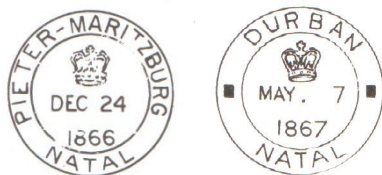


Fig 5. The first town date stamps (Type F), (ex HKL).

Eighteen numeral hand stamps were initially issued to their respective post offices (Dickson 1996) and the balance of six over the next few years (i.e. 1861 Nottingham & Sinquasi, 1862 Point, 1863 Tongaat, 1864 Newcastle, 1865 Cathkin) when these post offices were opened. Barred numeral obliterations HKL Types H, I.1 and I.2 were issued to post offices as these were subsequently opened, became operative after 1865, or as replacements for worn type G, H or I.1 obliterations. By the late 1870s the numeral cancellers in use were numbered 1 to 75 (Fig 6).

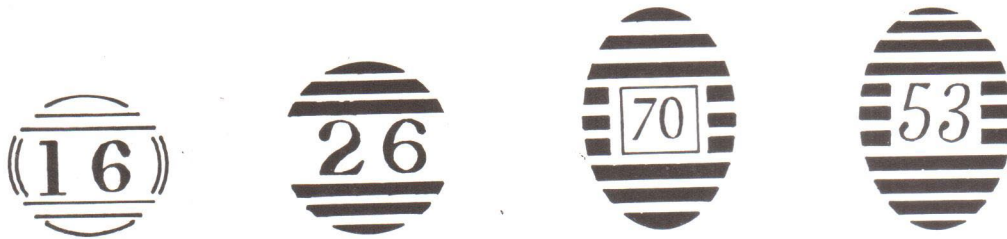


Fig 6. The four types of barred numeral obliterators (ex HKL).

**Segmented and shield type date stamps.**

In the early to mid-1870s the Type F date stamps were replaced by either segmented (Durban, G. P. O., Branch Office, HKL Type J & K) or shield type numeral date stamps (HKL Type L). The date stamps were applied to the cover and rarely to an adhesive (Fig 7). The stamp on the cover was cancelled with the barred numeral Type G or H device; thus continuing a two-step process in cancelling the mail. The shield numeral hand stamps were numbered 3 to 72 however, only about half of these have been recorded.

The inner circle of the Type J postmark for G. P. O. is partially divided by short horizontal and a vertical line that do not meet at the center. The Type K postmarks differ from the Type J in that the inner circle is divided in half by a continuous horizontal line and the upper segment is also divided into two halves with all inner lines meeting at the center of the inner circle. The Branch Office postmark is of the Type K design but has 'P. M. B.' at the bottom of the double circle and not 'NATAL'. Only two copies of this postmark have been recorded. The location of this subsidiary post office at Pietermaritzburg is unknown.



Fig 7. Partially divided inner circle (Type J), divided inner circle (Type K), and shield numeral (Type L) date stamps (ex HKL).

**Circular date stamps.**

The numeral, segmented, and shield postmarks were superseded by double or single circle dated town stamps. These were larger in diameter than previous cancellers, they varied in their design and to a lesser extent in the dimensions of the diameter, also and without exception, the word 'NATAL' was included at the bottom. The variation in the design of the different cancelling devices relates to the inclusion or not of either, dots, solid circles, solid squares, solid square bars, longer curved bars, Maltese crosses or small crosses between the place name and NATAL. These marks are particularly useful in distinguishing cancellations when listing the postmarks that originated from Natal post offices (Fig 8). From about the mid-1890s the cancellers used at some post offices included an Index alphabet letter above the day-month dates as a time signal for dispatch of the mail (e.g. 'A' or 'P' for AM or PM), later the actual time of day was included for those post offices handling large amounts of mail.

Alternative to the name of the town various circular date stamps indicated a specific service provided by the postal department. These date stamps included either the word 'REGISTERED', 'PARCELS', 'M.O.O.' (money order office), 'OFFICIAL PAID', 'POSTAGE PAID', or 'RETURNED LETTER OFFICE'. Post offices associated with the Natal Government Railways used circular date stamps that indicated that the post office was located at a railway station by incorporating the word 'RAIL', 'ROAD', 'ROAD RAIL', 'JUNCTION', or 'T. P. O.' (travelling post office) in its design.





Fig 8. Examples of the double and single circle town date stamps (ex HKL).

Temporary and or skeleton type postmarks exist and were used when:

- There was a delay in the replacement of the canceller that had been in use by a new one. Damage or wear of a canceller was progressive resulting in impressions becoming so indistinct that these became illegible. Some cancellers fell out of use because it was impossible to advance the year dates (e.g. at the turn of the century).
- Post office equipment including cancellers was lost from those post offices and post office agencies that were captured by the Boer forces during the invasion of Natal in 1899-1900. With the recapture of northern Natal by the British Army from May 1900 the Natal postal department re-opened some of these post offices and provided them with either temporary date stamps or P O A numbered obliterations.
- A temporary post office was established for special events e.g. a military camp.

### Post Office Agencies.

At small remote farming and rural settlements and some mission stations a postal facility was often housed in a general store located or room. Postal agencies were established to provide a postal service for the communities living there. They were authorized to carry out limited postal functions and were provided with a unique barred obliterator with the letters P. O. A. above a number (Fig 9). These hand stamps were numbered 1 to 123 and their use dates from 1889. They have been extensively researched initially by the Philatelic Society of Natal, and subsequently by HKL (1977), Kantey (1982), and Porter (2019). As a consequence of all of this research it has been stated that it would be impossible to establish a comprehensive collection of the Natal POAs.



Fig 9. The numeral P. O. A. obliterator used at Post Office Agencies (ex HKL).

The reason for that statement is because a particular POA canceller was re-allocated frequently from one postal agency to several other postal agencies during its period of use that, in some cases, extended for many years even into the earlier years of the Union of South Africa. The period of use of a particular canceller issued to a postal agency varied from a few months to several years and given relatively small volumes of outward mail from such agencies there are few if any surviving covers or postcards having the POA cancellation. In order to identify where a particular numbered POA mark was applied to a postal item requires a complex process. It requires that such items have the address of the sender as well as transit and arrival date stamps cancellations. The transit cancellations become important as this usually has a cancellation of the Head Post Office through which the item passed in order for it to enter the postal system. With this information one has to consult the check lists compiled from official postal department records by Kantey (1982) or Porter (2019) to confirm its use at that place. Use of the four volumes by RF Putzel *The Encyclopedia of South African Post Offices and Postal Agencies* was of considerable help in identifying head post offices for postal agencies.

### Army Post Office cancellations.

Military actions occurred periodically in Natal from 1842 to 1907 involving units of the British Army and Natal Volunteer Regiments. Two of these actions were against the Zulus (1873 Langalabalele and 1879 Anglo Zulu War) and three against the Dutch (Boer) settlers (1842 Battle on Congella, 1880-81 First Anglo Boer War, 1898-1902 Second Anglo Boer War). The Natal Militia engaged with the Zulus in the 1906 Bambatha Rebellion and 1907 arrest of King Dinuzulu. With the exception of the Anglo Boer War 1899 – 1902, on active service mail entered the Natal postal system and was cancelled at civilian post offices.

### Postmarks of the Boer forces in Natal.

The Postal Department of the Zuid Afrikaanse Republiek (Z A R) opened post offices in Natal along the railway line from Charlestown to Modderspruit (near Ladysmith) during their invasion at the commencement of the Anglo Boer War. Initially, captured Natal hand stamps were used at some towns to cancel the mail from members of the Boer forces. For some other towns a hand stamp was made from movable rubber type placed in a holder and are found in either a single, two, three or four line configurations of some 12 variations of P. K. town name / Z A R / date or Veldpost Z A R / town name/ date e.g. for Newcastle postmarks. The various different types are illustrated in HKL (1977).

A double circle canceller was used at the headquarters of the Boer forces outside besieged Ladysmith with HOOFDLAGER at the top and Z. A. R. at the bottom (Fig 10). The date was in a single line. It moved with the Boer forces as they retreated in May 1900 ahead of the advancing British Army via Glencoe, Newcastle to the Natal-Transvaal border.

The standard type canceller used by the Boer field post offices was a rubber oval hand stamp that was used on mail at several towns in northern Natal. Cancellations were in violet or red ink and there are various sub-types recorded. Initially the postmarks read town name / date / Z. A. R., this was followed by postmarks where the 'Z. A. R.' was removed, these were followed by oval rubber made postmarks usually with 'Veld Post Z. A. R.' at the top, date, then town name at the bottom (Fig 10).



Fig 10. Examples of date stamps used by the Boer Forces during their invasion of Natal (ex HKL).

### Postmarks of the British Army in Natal.

The British Army mobilized the Army Post Office Corps; the orders were received by the 24<sup>th</sup> Middlesex Volunteer Rifle Corps. Arrangements were made for the transfer of the unit to Cape Town. Due to the decision to send half the army to Natal necessitated the establishment of a Base Army Post Office at Pietermaritzburg together with Field Post Offices (FPO) attached to Army Headquarters, Divisions, and Brigades. A cooperative working relationship developed between the Army Post Office Corps, Natal Postal Department, and the Natal Government Railways. This allowed for Field Post Offices to be located along or near the railway line leading to the Natal – Transvaal border and for the in- and outward 'on active service' mails to be transferred along this route to and from the harbour at Durban from where it was taken by steamships of the Union Castle Line to Britain.

The cancellers issued to Natal Field Force Army Field Post Offices were generally of a standard design being double circle with 'FIELD POST OFFICE' at the top and 'BRITISH ARMY. S. AFRICA' at the bottom. A number (e.g. from 1 to 47) was included above the month-day date with the year date below. These numbered codes allow for the identification of the specific FPO using that canceller and for determining its approximate location in the field of engagement as the British Army advanced into northern Natal (Fig 11). A single circle 'FIELD .P.O' date stamp was used by two Advanced Depot s in Natal. Large single circle rubber date stamps with codes 8B and 3MB were used by the FPOs servicing the 8<sup>th</sup> Brigade and 3<sup>rd</sup> Mounted Infantry Brigade.



Fig 11. Examples of British Army postmarks used in Natal during their advancement to the Transvaal border (ex Proud).

### Postmarks of Zululand.

The earliest mail originating in Zululand usually sent by missionaries would enter the Natal postal system at a border post office as no official postal service was provided in the territory. An early cover of 1876 has a shield No. 56 for Zululand cancellation on a stamp of Natal. On active service mail from members of the British Army sent during the Anglo Zulu War of 1879 that entered the Natal postal system at Stanger, Dundee, or was either transported to Durban or Pietermaritzburg where it was cancelled. An 1882 cover sent from a mission station near Eshowe has Natal stamps cancelled by a mute barred oval mark. It entered the Natal postal system at Lower Tugela.

Zululand was annexed by Britain in 1887 and initially stamps of Natal were used and cancelled by a double circle Eshowe canceller (without Zululand or Natal); the earliest date recorded is 19 SE 87. A postal agreement between Natal and Zululand authorities came into force on 1 May 1888. Stamps of Great Britain overprinted ZULULAND were issued on 1 May 1888. Between 1887 and 1893 of 15 post offices that operated in Zululand several were located at the resident magistrate's office. The first set of postmarks is unique and varies greatly in their design and is illustrated by HKL (1977). The most widely used postmark for Zululand was a double circle with the town name at the top and ZULULAND at the bottom (Fig 11). Although Zululand was annexed to the Colony of Natal on 31 December 1897, stamps of the territory were still valid for postal purposes until 30 June 1898. Cancellers were not immediately replaced and continued to be used, some well into the Union of South Africa period.

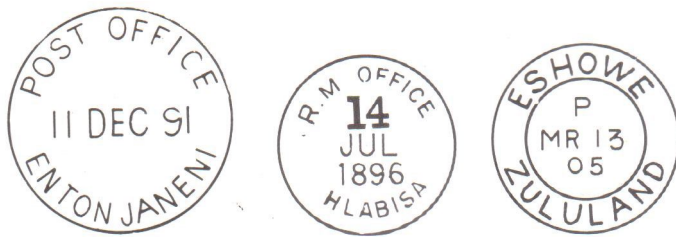


Fig 12. Examples of some of the types of postmarks used in Zululand (ex HKL).

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