

Half Penny Postage Due

by Stephen F Prest

with grateful acknowledgement to Pat Skinner

Further to my recent notes appearing in the February 2010 edition of *The Mail Coach*, my colleague and partner-in-crime on matters philatelic, Pat Skinner and I have come across an interesting entry in the March 16, 1950 P&T Official Circular which sheds considerable light on the Cover #1 of my earlier article which, as readers will recall, bore a single 1944 1½d. George VI Rose-red stamp to pay a deficiency of 6 centimes and Cover #2 which also had an inferred conversion rate of 1d. = 4 centimes.

Order No. 8 of the March 16, 1950 Official Circular reads in part:

8. Rule 395 (General and Postal) – Overseas Correspondence Short-paid: Surcharging

“Consequent upon the devaluation of sterling, the conversion rate used for surcharges has been brought into true relationship with the present-day value of the gold franc. The new conversion rate is 1d. = 4 centimes, replacing the former rate of 1d. = 10 centimes.

“Rule 395(new) : The conversion of shillings and pence for the purposes of surcharging outwards correspondence and the collection of surcharge on inward correspondence is fixed at a rate of 4 centimes to 1d., except that under the provision of the Union Convention, the minimum surcharge that can be imposed or collected is 5 centimes. Thus—

“1d. = 5 centimes (minimum)

“1½d. = 6 "

“2d. = 8 "

“3d. = 12 "

1s. 6d. = 48 "

2s. 6d. = 1 franc 20 centimes

(Further references : [Ex. 3/50] and [P. & T. 1959/248])”

What we learned from this Official Circular entry was that the former conversion rate of 1d. = 10 centimes remained in effect up to at least September 18, 1949 (the first day following the September 17th overnight devaluation of sterling) and presumably for a period thereafter. Orders in the Official Circular generally reflected actions or instructions that had been issued in the prior month or so but, as this Order No. 8 does not state an effective date for the changeover to the new 1d. = 4 centimes exchange rate, we cannot be certain as to the precise effective date without further research into the matter.

Turning our minds to what all this meant with respect to the use of halfpenny postage dues, the following can be said. First we know that sometime between late September 1949 and early March 1950, the Post and Telegraph Department instituted the new 1d. = 4 centimes exchange rate for short-paid mail. The minimum charge was set at 1d. so we know that half penny postage due stamps would not be found in sole use on short-paid incoming mail from either Inland or Overseas points of origin. However, it could be found in combination with other postage due stamps to make up fractional halfpenny rates as was demonstrated with Cover # 1 of my February 2010 article. Finally, as the use of postage due stamps fell away on 30 September 1951, we know that there is a limited period of not more than 24 months when it might be possible to confirm the use of a half penny postage due stamp to make up a fractional rate during the period an exchange rate of 1d. = 4 centimes remained in force.

Having said that, I would like to conclude this letter with an example of “What Might Have Been” had a postal clerk located somewhere between Auckland and Silverdale been a little more up to speed on the new rules. The cover below was mailed from the Bombay, India suburb of Matunga on 13 December 1950 and probably would have arrived in New Zealand sometime in early 1951. The cover is marked “6 c” deficient in manuscript and hand-stamped 2d. deficient, I presume by a New Zealand postal clerk in the delivery chain. Little did he or she know at the time how disappointed 21st century George VI philatelists would be in their performance, first by not applying the ruling 1½d. = 6 centimes exchange rate of the day and then not applying postage due stamps to the cover in any case!



Figure 1. Letter from India marked 6 centimes short-paid, charged 2d (should have been 1½d. - Early 1951 arrival in New Zealand)

Recently I obtained the cover below which shows the use of postage due stamps in the 1d. = 4 centimes exchange rate era. It is rated as 120 centimes or 2s.6d. (30d.) deficient and which was paid by ten 1939 3d. postage due stamps. The cover was cancelled “Postmen’s Branch Wanganui” dated April 13, 1950 which is quite early in period under review in this letter.



Figure 2. Letter from Canada marked 120 centimes short-paid, charged 2s.6d & paid with 10 1939 3d postage due stamps – April 1950

In conclusion, the time period when the conversion rate from 10 to 4 centimes to one pence took place has been narrowed to a period of about six months between mid September 1949 and early March 1950. One example of the use of postage due stamps during the 4 centime per penny era has been identified as having occurred in April 1950. We are still looking for further reference to the exact date the 1d. = 4 centime exchange rate became effective and of course, we are still looking for that elusive half penny postage due stamp on cover, this time in combination with other postage due stamps to make up a fractional half penny deficiency.

We would be interested to learn of any specific reference to the date this change in conversion rate took place and other aspects of this “philatelic puzzle” from other members as time permits via email at stephen.prest@gmail.com or by regular post through the kind auspices of our Editor of *The Mail Coach*.