

15.

Penny Postage Act.

THE NEW ACT

(2 & 3 VICTORIA, CAP. 52)

FOR ESTABLISHING

A UNIFORM

PENNY POSTAGE.

Passed 17th August, 1839.



WITH EXPLANATORY NOTES.

LONDON:

R. MACDONALD, 30, GREAT SUTTON STREET,
CLERKENWELL.

Price One Penny.

[1839.]

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO



THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

AN ACT

For the further regulation of the Duties on Postage until
the 5th October, 1840.

[1 & 2 VICTORIA, CAP. 52.—Passed, 17th August, 1839.]

Whereas it is expedient that the present Rates of Inland Postage on letters should be reduced to one uniform rate of a penny, charged on every letter of a given weight, to be hereafter fixed and determined, with a proportionate increase for greater weights; parliamentary privileges of franking being abolished, and official franking being strictly regulated, and parliament pledging itself to make good any deficiency of revenue which may be occasioned by such alterations of the rates of existing duties: and whereas it is expedient and necessary to give by law a temporary authority to the lords of her majesty's treasury to take the necessary steps to give effect to such reduction, and to make orders and regulations for the same; which reductions, orders and regulations shall have force and effect to the 5th October 1840, and no longer; be it therefore enacted, That it shall be lawful for the lords of the treasury, from time to time, and at any time after the passing of this act, by warrant under their hands, to alter, fix, reduce, or remit all or any of the rates of British or inland or other postage payable by law on the transmission of post letters, and to subject such letters to rates of postage according to the weight thereof, and a scale of weight to be contained in such warrant (without reference to the distance or number of miles the same shall be conveyed), and to fix and limit the weight of letters to be sent by the post, and from time to time by warrant as aforesaid, to alter or repeal any such altered or reduced rates, and make and establish any new or other rates in lieu thereof, and from time to time, by warrant as aforesaid, to appoint at what time the rates which may be payable are to be paid: that is to say, whether on posting the letter, or on the receipt thereof, or at either of those times, at the option of the sender; provided always, that all such warrants shall be inserted in the London Gazette ten days at least before coming into operation, and shall within fourteen days after making the same be

laid before both houses of parliament (if then sitting), or otherwise within fourteen days after parliament shall meet. § 1.

Rates to be charged by Postmaster General.—And the rates of postage from time to time to be altered or reduced and fixed by any such warrant shall be charged by and be paid to her majesty's postmaster general on all post letters to which such warrant shall extend. § 2.

Treasury may suspend power of Franking.—And it shall be lawful for the lords of the treasury, by warrant under their hands, to suspend wholly or in part any parliamentary or official privilege of sending and receiving letters by the post free of postage, or any other franking privilege of any description whatsoever, as well under the 1 Vic. c. 35, intituled, *An Act for regulating the sending and receiving of letters and packets by the post, free from the duty of postage*, as under any other act or acts of parliament now in force, and to make such regulations for the future exercise of official franking as they shall think fit. Provided also, that every warrant to be issued by the lords of the treasury for the suspension of the parliamentary privilege of franking, shall be inserted in the London Gazette ten days at least before coming into operation, and shall within fourteen days after making the same be laid before both houses of parliament (if then sitting), or otherwise within fourteen days after parliament shall meet. § 3.

Treasury may regulate Twopenny and Penny Posts.—And it shall be lawful for the lords of the treasury, by warrant under their hands, and inserted in the London Gazette ten days at least before coming into operation, to suspend wholly or in part the regulations and privileges established and given by law in respect of letters sent by the twopenny post in London and Dublin, and also by any penny post, and in respect of any other letters which may be now sent by the post at a low or reduced rate of postage or free of postage, and to declare and direct that all and every or any of such post letters shall be charged and chargeable with the like rates of postage as any other letters transmitted by the post, or to make such other regulations in respect thereof as in such warrant shall from time to time be expressed. § 4.

Stamped Covers.—Provided, That it shall be lawful for the lords of the treasury, by warrant under their hands to be inserted in the London Gazette (which warrant may be rescinded, varied, or

altered, as they shall from time to time think fit), to direct that letters written on stamped paper, or enclosed in stamped covers, or having a stamp affixed thereto (the stamp in every case being of the value or amount in such last-mentioned warrant to be expressed and specially provided for the purpose under the authority of this act), shall, if within the limitation of weight to be fixed under the provisions of this act, and if the stamp have not been used before, pass by the post free of postage; and also to require that every letter sent by the post shall, in the cases to be specified in any such last-mentioned warrant, be written on such stamped paper, or enclosed in such stamped cover, or have such stamps as aforesaid affixed, or that in default thereof, or in case the stamp on which any letter shall be written, or the stamp on the cover in which it shall be enclosed or to which it shall be affixed, shall be of less value or amount than in such warrant shall be expressed, or shall have been used before, such letter shall be charged and chargeable with such rate of postage as such warrant shall direct.

And it shall be lawful for the lords of the treasury to order and direct the commissioners of stamps and taxes from time to time to provide proper and sufficient dies or other implements for expressing and denoting the rates or duties which shall be directed by any such warrant as aforesaid, and to give any other orders and make any other regulations relative thereto they may consider expedient. § 6.

Account to be kept of Stamps.—And the commissioners of stamps and taxes shall cause a separate account to be kept of the stamp duties arising under this act; and it shall be lawful for the lords of the treasury, and they are hereby empowered, from time to time to authorize and require the said commissioners of stamps and taxes to direct their Receiver-General to pay over such sum and sums of money arising from the said stamp duties, as the lords of the treasury shall think proper, to the account of the Receiver-General of the Post Office at the Bank of England; and all such sums of money which shall be so paid over, shall be held for the said last-mentioned receiver-general, subject to all annuities and yearly sums now charged by law on or payable out of the Post Office revenue, and all other charges, outgoings and disbursements to which the Post Office revenue is at present liable. § 7.

Rates on Stamped Covers to be deemed Stamp Duties.—And the

rates or duties which shall be expressed or denoted by any such dies as aforesaid, shall be denominated and deemed to be stamp duties, and shall be under the care and management of the commissioners of stamps and taxes for the time being; and all the powers, provisions, clauses, regulations, directions, fines, forfeitures, pains and penalties contained in or imposed by the several acts now in force relating to stamp duties (so far as the the same may be applicable), shall be of full force and effect with respect to the stamps to be provided under or by virtue of this present act, and to the paper on which the same shall be impressed, or to which the same shall be affixed, and shall be observed, applied, enforced, and put in execution for the raising, levying, collecting, and securing of the rates or duties denoted thereby, and for preventing, detecting and punishing all frauds, forgeries, and other offences relating thereto, as fully and effectually to all intents and purposes as if such powers, provisions, clauses, regulations, and directions, fines, forfeitures, pains, and penalties had been herein repeated and specially enacted with reference to the said last-mentioned stamps and rates or duties respectively. § 8.

And all post letters shall be posted, forwarded, conveyed and delivered, under and subject to all such orders and directions, regulations, limitations and restrictions as the postmaster general, with the consent of the lords of the treasury, shall from time to time direct. § 9.

Masters of Outward-bound Vessels required to take Bags of Letters.—And the penalty which by the 1 Vic. c. 36, intituled *An Act for consolidating the laws relative to offences against the Post Office of the United Kingdom, and for regulating the judicial administration of the Post Office laws, and for explaining certain terms and expressions employed in those laws*, is imposed on every master of a vessel to Ceylon, the Mauritius, the East Indies, or the Cape of Good Hope who shall refuse to take a post letter bag delivered or tendered to him by an officer of the Post Office, shall henceforth extend and apply to the master of every vessel outward-bound who shall refuse to take a post letter bag delivered or tendered to him by an officer of the Post Office for conveyance; but every such master shall be entitled to the same gratuities as the master of any other vessel, not being a post office packet, conveying letters for or on behalf of the Post Office. § 10.

And it shall be lawful for the lords of the treasury to make any

reduction or alteration they may consider expedient in the gratuities allowed by law to masters of vessels for letters conveyed by them, for or on behalf of the Post Office, between places within the United Kingdom and between the United Kingdom and the islands of Man, Jersey, Guernsey, Sark, and Alderney, and to allow any gratuities for the conveyance of letters to masters of vessels, passing to or from, or between any of her majesty's colonies or possessions beyond the seas, if they shall think fit, not exceeding the gratuities payable to masters of vessels for the conveyance of ship letters from the United Kingdom to places beyond the seas. § 11.

The word Letter to be deemed all Papers transmitted by Post.—Whenever the word “letter” or “letters” is used in this act, the same shall be held to include newspapers, and any other packet, paper, article, or thing transmitted by the post, but not so as to deprive newspapers of any privilege they now legally possess, of passing free of postage; and the provisions of this act shall be construed according to the respective interpretations of the terms and expressions contained in the said act of the 1 Vic. c. 36, so far as those interpretations are not repugnant to the subject, or inconsistent with the context of such provisions. § 12.

Quorum of Lords of the Treasury.—And wherever the order, consent or direction, or any other act of the lords of the treasury is prescribed or required by this act, such order, consent, direction or other act may be signified under the hands of the lords of the treasury, or any three of them. § 13.

Continuance of Act.—This act, and all warrants issued under the authority of the same, shall absolutely cease and determine on the 5th October 1840; unless parliament shall declare to the contrary (except in respect of any postage duties which may then have become payable); and of any proceeding for recovery of such duties, and except also as to any offence committed against the provisions of this or any other act, and any fine or penalty incurred by reason of any such offence, and any proceeding for recovery of any such fine or penalty, or for the punishment of any offender. § 14.

Act may be altered.—This act may be amended or repealed by any act to be passed during the present session of parliament. § 15.

NOTES.

THE question still remains undecided whether stamped covers, stamped paper, or stamps to be affixed shall be used.

Mr. Hill proposes to use stamped envelopes—that is, half sheets of paper with a complex engraved figure such as we see on bank-notes, impressed on them from a die. The envelopes would be of different kinds; those charged 1*d.* would carry letters of half an ounce weight (including the cover); those charged 2*d.*, letters of an ounce, the words “ounce” and “half-ounce” being engraved on the die, and easily legible in the impression. These envelopes would be sold by the Stamp-office by the gross, and retailed by stationers, as bill and receipt stamps now are. If the stamp or engraving should not afford sufficient security against forgery, he proposes to use a peculiar species of paper invented by Mr. Dickinson, which has blue or red silk threads interwoven with its fabric, and disposed in figured patterns. It can only be made by very complex and costly machinery, also contrived by Mr. Dickinson, and covered by a patent, and is therefore an article which could not be successfully imitated. These envelopes are essential to Mr. Hill’s plan of pre-payment, which, when rendered universal, as it will ultimately be, offers immense advantages. First, an individual, by purchasing some hundred envelopes, may pay his whole year’s postage at once, and thus be saved a vast deal of trouble. Secondly, two-thirds of the time spent by the postman in delivering letters will be saved, and much bookkeeping and money accounting superseded, as the revenue will be entirely collected by the Stamp-office. Thirdly, the opportunities for fraud will be taken away which the present method of pre-payment affords, letters being sometimes destroyed, and the money pocketed by the postage clerks, or the messengers sent to the office. Such a breach of trust may be rarely committed; but the apprehension of it causes trouble and uneasiness. There are many minor advantages attending this method of pre-payment on which we forbear to dwell.

The plan of glueing small stamps to the letter would involve an amount of trouble and inconvenience which would inevitably lead to its speedy abandonment. Is every man or woman, in town or country, who writes a letter once in six weeks or three months, to have a glue or gum pot at his or her elbow? In how many cases would the stamp fall off, or be rubbed off, when the letters were tumbled into the mail bags. And what is to follow then? A second payment of postage, or squabbles innumerable with the letter carriers. The stamped cover, besides its perfect security would have this further advantage, that a penny envelope might easily carry two letters or notes of thin paper, and a twopenny one might carry the billets of a family of five or six persons. The post-office merely takes cognizance of the weight. Four ordinary letters generally weigh an ounce. The number sent through the Post-office at present is about 80,000,000 per annum.

We fully agree with those who think that the advantages of Mr. Hill’s plan are not only commercial and economical, but moral, and that in a very high degree. The facilities it will afford for the interchange of thought, and the diffusion of ideas, must be immense; but they will not be fully seen or appreciated till it has been many years in operation.

THE END.