

Jamaica Newsletter No. 17

By Thomas Foster

From time to time, the specialist collector comes across mysterious items that are puzzling and arouse a lot of speculation as to what has occurred in the past. Occasionally, the answer turns up and everything falls into place: but, too often, no satisfactory solution can be found and all concerned remain undecided as to the true facts. During a conversation with Ken Watson at the recent Y.P.A. Convention in Hull, I was shown vertical paste-up pairs of the 1938 ½d green and 1d red definitives, stated to have been made for use in coil machines. Having never seen, or recorded, anything like this of this period before, further information is sought from readers as, to the best of my knowledge, no coil machinery existed in the island prior to December 20th, 1966, when four machines were installed in the Kingston G.P.O., for the dispensing of the 1d, 3d and 6d stamps of the 1964 definitives, and these have been out of use since decimilation. Unfortunately, it is only too simple to fake material of this kind.

It is not often that a nation publicly advertises a past error of judgment, yet such has been acknowledged by the Jamaica Post Office in producing the attractive issue commemorating (if that is the right word) the centenary of the introduction of the mongoose into the island. The whole story of this ill-advised affair is told in print on the miniature sheet which accompanies the normal stamps. This shows that introducing the mongoose to exterminate destructive vermin had to be followed by the control of the destructive mongoose!

Incidentally, the postal authorities are probably repeating a mistake of earlier years as I understand that only a small quantity of these sheets were sold over post office counters at above face value, the majority being distributed through the Crown Agents! Whether this is true remains to be officially confirmed but it appears as if the post office have overlooked the criticism received in 1962 when they were castigated by the philatelic press for marketing the miniature sheet for the Caribbean Games at above face value. It remains to be seen whether Gibbons will refuse to list this latest memento as they did with the Games sheet.

In addition, the high face value of the normal stamps has aroused criticism from many dealers, some of whom have decided not to stock future Jamaican issues because of this. Perhaps it would have been better if the unadopted fourth design had been included and lower face values chosen for those issued. As it is, it is difficult to see what initial postal rates will be covered by 8 cents, 40 cents and 60 cents stamps.

Postal History, 1939-45

A find of covers originating with the Canadian forces serving in Jamaica during the last war has revealed several interesting features and one or two important items. Amongst them was a cover from the fourth of the serving Canadian regiments, the Brockville Rifles carrying on its obverse, in bluish-green, the hand-stamped censor marking of that unit, type M-CA3, but numbered '325' instead of the more usually-seen '316'. Also included was an unstamped 'Free' cover from that unit, the first to be recorded.

Nowadays it is quite common to, uncover important details of wartime postal history that have never been noticed previously and many of these concern mail-routing taken because of events in Europe during 1940 when airmail destined for the Fax East and Africa via this country had, instead, to be sent westwards across the Pacific. I have been shown covers, hand-stamped 'VIA SINGAPORE' and with various confirmatory censor markings, that have been flown across the U.S.A. and the Pacific to addresses in the Persian Gulf and East Africa, at what appear to be rates of 4s. sterling per ½ oz. Perhaps some readers may have similar covers to show me in order that the complete story of this mail route can be uncovered?

Postal Stationery

Prior to 1964, the inland postcard rate was 1d but this was increased to 1½d when the 'Arms' type postcards were issued on May 4th, 1964. Recently, a commercially-used 1d. postcard from Constant Spring to Kingston has turned up, bearing an additional vertically-bisected 1962 1d. Independence stamp and all tied with a strike of the CONSTANT SPRING (SC1) dater of March 19th, 1965. The top left corner of the card has been endorsed by the sender, 'No 4d. Stamp'! If this item got through unsurcharged, presumably others could exist and if you have one hidden away in that box of oddments, please let me know.

The new 9 cents Airletter Form duly appeared on February 5th, presumably the work of McCorquodale's. The imprinted stamp in scarlet and yellow on the blue background of the letter, shows the tailplane of an aircraft of the local airline, AIR JAMAICA.

Meter Frankings.

These are not everybody's cup of tea but they are an interesting part of the postal history of the island and, with the help of Colonel F. F. Seifert, work has already commenced on a check-list. Recently, three entirely new types have been coming into use, two appearing to be from Pitney Bowes machines. The first, in a narrow rectangular format, has serial numbers in the 6,000's, whilst the second is about 22 mm. square with the accompanying dated portion having only a single ring. The third frank bears the lettering 'RV' and is probably one of the new Roneo machines.