

Jamaica Newsletter No. 20 (Reporting from Jamaica)

By Thomas Foster

Over the Christmas holidays, an expedition from the Scientific Exploration Society carried out an historical and scientific survey in the Blue Mountains of St. Mary, Portland and St. Thomas. One of their tasks was to seek traces of the two Maroon Kingdoms which once existed in those areas and the venture was partially financed by special covers which were carried by the expedition, sent back from their base camp and are expected to be marketed in the near future. I have received from an anonymous sender, a cover postmarked at Retirement in St. Elizabeth, the approximate site of the third Maroon Kingdom of those days, at the other end of the island, bearing a red rectangular cachet reading 'TRELAWNEY TOWN /1738-39'. Whether this has any connection with the aforementioned quest, only time will tell.

* * * * *

Many readers will be aware that I have recently returned from an enjoyable sojourn in Jamaica and my outstanding memories will always be of the overwhelming hospitality, the magnificent weather and the delicious 'Red Stripe', the local beer, bottled and served ice-cold! Everyone went out of their way to make my stay a memorable one and two displays given to the Jamaica Philatelic Society on consecutive Saturday and Sunday mornings at 10 a.m. in the Terra Nova Hotel were well attended and received. The local society are making great strides in furthering the hobby in the island and the interest aroused in my selection of postal history material must have been encouraging to the hard-working secretary, Jack Blackmore, and all concerned.

On one occasion, I accompanied Mr. G. DePass, the Assistant Postmaster General, on an inspection tour of post offices in the south of the island, encompassing Bushy Park, Old Harbour, Salt River, Hayes, Lionel Town, Alley, Race Course, Milk River, Victoria Town, Pratville, Newport, Knockpatrick, Mandeville and Williamsfield. This proved most interesting and enabled one to see, at first hand, the administrative difficulties experienced by many of these lonely offices in maintaining a regular postal service. Breaking our journey, we lunched on 'Stew Beef' at the old Milk River Bath Hotel, which postal historians will recall as the site of a now defunct post office possessing a very rare postmark. Returning through the beautiful Mandeville countryside, which my companion knew well in his younger days, I was introduced to the best thirst-quencher I have ever tasted, the 'jelly' coconut, which is simply the unripe green coconut with the top sliced off enabling one to drink the contents!

Stamp issuing policy and programme

Another afternoon was spent with Mr. Rupert Knight, the Postmaster General, during which time a detailed discussion took place on the stamp-issuing policy of the Jamaica Post Office and its intentions in the future. As far as possible, it is the intention to limit future issues to about four sets per annum probably accompanied by one miniature sheet annually and, wherever possible, the subjects chosen will depict Jamaican themes. A Christmas issue planned for 1975 will probably show the famous 'Jon Canoe' dancers which are such a feature of the countryside during the festive season whilst, in addition to the forthcoming mail-boat set in April, there will be issues to commemorate the U.P.U. in May, the National Dance Theatre and the 21st Anniversary of the First Intake of Students at the University of the West Indies at Mona. Other future sets will illustrate indigenous butterflies and old maps.

Newly-recorded Dummer letters

The opportunity was also taken of inspecting various old letters in the West India Reference Library and verifying certain finds that have been made there during the past year. Amongst these, are no less than eight previously-unrecorded Dummer Packet Letters, seven of which bear the names of the boats

which carried them. These items are from the same correspondence as the Dummer letter exhibited in the Institute of Jamaica¹ which was carried by the packet Frankland. The details of the new discoveries are as follows and bring the number of known Dummer Packet letters to about a dozen:—

- (a) June 9th, 1705 to London, per, Six Islands packet boat.
- (b) March 9th, 1706 to London, per Prince George packet boat.
- (c) May 11th, 1706 to London, per Antego (Antego) packet boat.
- (d) June 19th, 1707 to London, per Kingston packet boat.
- (e) August 28th, 1707 to London, per Frankland packet boat.
- (f) December 5th, 1707 to London, per Antegoa (Antego) packet boat.
- (g) June 18th, 1708 to London, per Antegoa (Antego) packet boat.
- (h) September 25th, 1708 to London, per Packet Q.D.C., the boat being unnamed.



Another fine letter in the Library carries a good strike of a previously-unrecorded ship letter marking for RIO BUENO on a letter dated 1826. The possibility of the existence of this marking was discussed in my book and it is very similar in style to the 'reversed' step British Ship Letter handstamps. The ST. ANNS ship letter marking of this type mentioned on page 105 of my book and which could not previously be proven as Jamaican would now appear to be so and can be added to our definitive listing. The new type SL5a is illustrated.

Flower and Orchid Transparencies

In the course of conversation with Dr. C. D. Adams, I took the opportunity of viewing the 35 mm colour slides from which the recent Flower and Orchid sets were prepared. These are really beautiful and it is a pity that their charm could not have been better reproduced on the actual stamps. On yet another occasion, I drove out with Lloyd Brandon for the day intent on photographing all the post offices on our way to Morant Bay. This we succeeded in doing before travelling back via Seaforth, past Serge Island and Trinityville, and up through the beautiful Cedar Valley before descending via the Yallahs River Valley and Cambridge Hill by a long, unsurfaced rural road and photographing several small agencies en route.

Other days were spent in the company of Stephen Hopwood and his charming wife, Liz, at their beautiful home in Kingston; with Basil and Kitty Cawston at their cocktail party and on the several occasions when we dropped in for drinks and to talk stamps, and with Ronnie and Avery Wong at their secluded residence in the fantastic Red Hills overlooking Kingston, where the local architecture has to be seen to be believed.

A dozen Spiny Lobsters

Those of you who have seen the Spiny Lobster, as depicted on various West Indian stamps, will be interested to hear that one evening we bought a dozen or more from a local fisherman at Port Royal, where they are kept caged in the sea and the customers choose their own, before taking them back to be barbecued for dinner that night. They are absolutely fantastic. My outstanding gastronomic impression of Jamaica however, will always be that of having pawpaw with lime juice for breakfast in the young morning! What a pity this delicious fruit does not travel well.

¹ Illustrated in the 'Governors of Jamaica in the First Half of the Eighteenth Century' by Frank Cundall.

Jamaica Newsletter No. 20 (Reporting from Jamaica)

By Thomas Foster

During the final few days of my visit, I had the opportunity of staying with one of Jamaica's old time collectors, Douglas Tucker, known island-wide as 'Lawyer' Tucker, at his beautiful home, Summerhill, high up in St. Ann and overlooking Browns Town, where everything we had for dinner that evening was grown on his estate. After proudly showing me part of his wonderful collection of orchids and bonzai trees, he brought out a fine mint copy of the 1d S.G.160, showing a perfect impression of the Queen's Head in black offset in the correct position on the reverse of the stamp. Apparently, the local postmistress had drawn his attention to it with some distress, complaining that she could not sell such an imperfect stamp (the only one in the sheet) and because of this, would he be interested in purchasing it for a penny in order that she could keep her books straight? The offer was accepted!