

THE WORK OF THE POST OFFICE.

The work of the Post Office during the past year, 1884, has in many of its departments shown a considerable growth.

The average number of letters to each person in the United Kingdom increased from 15 in 1854, 22 in 1864, to 38 in 1885. Including post-cards, the average per person was 42, a far larger proportion than in any other country. The number of post offices in the United Kingdom increased by 483, making the total number 16,434, of which 919 are head offices; 773 letter-boxes have been added, bringing the total number of receptacles of all sorts for letters up to about 33,000. The total number of officers on the permanent establishment of the department is about 48,000. The number added during the year having been 1966. The number of females included in this total is 2919. Besides the foregoing, there are, it is estimated, about 47,000 persons employed by local postmasters, &c., throughout the country to aid in carrying on the business of the department. During the year much attention was devoted to devising new measures for expediting the conveyance of mails by railway throughout the United Kingdom, and to completing measures undertaken in the previous year with the same object. Additional payments to railway companies, amounting in all to about £72,000 a year, were made. The number of parcels carried by the department increased steadily. No less than 22,904,273 parcels were posted, of which 19,222,047 were posted in England and Wales, 2,376,177 in Scotland, and 1,306,149 in Ireland. The arrangements for a Foreign and Colonial Parcel Post were completed, and the department accepts parcels not exceeding 7 lb. in weight for transmission to Gibraltar, Egypt, Aden, India, and British Burmah.

The number of letters, post-cards, newspapers, &c., received in the Returned Letter Offices was 5,626,875, showing a decrease of 1·8 per cent over the previous year. Of this total 512,636 letters were unreturnable, and of 26,472 letters which were posted without any address whatever, 1686 contained value to the total of £3898. Upwards of 45,000 parcels could not be delivered, owing chiefly to insecure packing and incomplete addresses. A remarkable instance of carelessness occurred at Birmingham: two cheques, for £117 and £20, one payable to bearer and the other uncrossed, were posted in a letter-box without cover or address. They were sent to the Returned Letter Office and duly restored to their owners.

The business of the Post Office Savings Bank continues to develop. The total amount due to depositors on Dec. 31 last was £44,773,773, an increase of £3,004,965 over the previous year. This is exclusive of the balance of Government Stock held by depositors at the close of the year, which amounted to £1,916,325. The deposits were 6,468,707 in number and £14,510,411 in amount, as compared with 6,297,368, amounting to £13,575,167, in 1883; and the withdrawals were 2,188,792 in number and £12,530,563 in amount, as compared with 2,075,465, amounting to £11,850,171, in 1883. The amount of interest credited to depositors was £1,025,117, being an increase of £69,206 over the previous year. The greatest number of deposits made in one day was 46,401, on Jan. 7, amounting to £102,789; but the largest amount deposited in one day was £123,506, which was deposited on Jan. 1. The greatest number of withdrawals in one day took place on Dec. 23, when there were 14,843, amounting to £45,859; and the largest amount withdrawn in one day was on Aug. 5, when the number was 8077 and the amount £76,472. The daily average of deposits was 21,107, amounting to £47,420, and of withdrawals 7147, amounting to £28,468. The average amount of each deposit was £2 4s. 11d., and of each withdrawal 5s. 14s. The number of new accounts opened during the year was 774,268, and 546,235 were closed, as compared with 772,201 accounts opened and 525,535 closed in 1883.

The inland money orders issued last year were upwards of 11,900,000 in number, and £23,500,000 in amount; the decrease, as compared with the previous year, being 1,832,605 in the number, and £1,475,418 in amount. Against this falling off must be reckoned the very large increase in the number and amount of postal orders referred to below. There was a slight decrease in the foreign orders, but an increase in the colonial orders. The total number of money orders of all descriptions was 12,214,592, and the amount £24,223,295, as compared with 14,028,302 and £25,646,009 in 1883-4. It is noticeable that upwards of 48 per cent of the money orders were for sums not exceeding £1. A system came into operation on Jan. 1 last under which foreign and colonial countries, which have no direct money order system between each other, can send and receive orders through Great Britain. This system, which is simple and inexpensive, but very convenient, has been adopted by a large number of States.

The increased facilities afforded by the provisions of the Act affecting postal orders, passed in 1883, and the reduction of the rates of commission, have contributed to the rapid development of that branch of business, and the total number of orders paid last year was 18,831,164, amounting in value to £7,855,347, as compared with 12,286,556 orders, amounting to £5,028,663, in 1883-4.

The telegraph business of the country shows but little development; an increase of only 435,000 messages in the year cannot be regarded as satisfactory. The yearly increase has, owing no doubt to the stagnation of trade, the competition of the telephones, and the rapidity of the letter post, been steadily diminishing during the last five years. The expenditure has, however, largely increased, and it will be noticed that last year it exceeded the revenue by about £36,000, and that for two years no contribution has been made towards the payment of the interest, amounting to £326,417 a year, on the capital invested. The department has at present twenty-seven telephone exchanges open in various country towns, with a list of 1141 subscribers, paying a total of £22,600 a year; but by far the greater part of the telephone exchange business of the country continues to be conducted by private companies, who now obtain licenses from the department on the very liberal terms laid down in August, 1884. The royalties paid by companies amounted to only £19,370 in the year. A considerable reduction is, however, about to be tried in the telegraph department.

The gross revenue of the Post Office for the year was £10,032,483, and the expenditure £7,386,185, leaving a net revenue of £2,646,298, being a decrease of £40,802 on the previous year.

POSTAL CHANGES IN 1885.

Letters posted at any branch office, receiving-house, pillar-post, or wall letter-box in the town districts of London up to 7 p.m. are in time for delivery the same night in the districts in which posted, and in certain adjoining districts. All the night mails for the provinces share in the extension of posting time. Thus, in the town districts the posting is as under:—In any letter-box, 6 p.m.; ditto, with fee of 1d., 7; at head district offices, with fee of 1d., 7.30; at St. Martin's-le-Grand, with fee of 1d., 7.45; at the railway stations, with fee of 1d., up to the time of the departure of the trains. For some towns the payment of a late fee is not required, as the night mail letters are forwarded by late trains.

Next to this change in immediate interest to Londoners is the complete reorganisation of the northern postal services, including the Scotch, Irish, and North of England mails. The great feature of the scheme is the establishment for the first time in the history of the Post Office of a special mail-train, which runs from Euston to Perth, detaching the Irish mails at Crewe, and having subsidiary services in connection with it. This train leaves Euston twenty minutes earlier than heretofore—namely, 8.30 p.m. Letters for this dispatch can be posted in the town districts of the metropolis generally without late fee half an hour later—namely, up to 6 p.m. at any office, letter-box, or pillar-post. On payment of a late fee of 1d., letters can be posted in town district letter-boxes one hour later—viz., up to 7 p.m.; and half an hour later at the head district offices—viz., up to 7.30 p.m.; and up to 7.45 p.m. at the chief office, St. Martin's-le-Grand. The late letter-box at the Euston-square Railway Station is kept open for the receipt of late letters, upon which 1d. fee must be prepaid, until 8.20 p.m., and such letters as may be posted in the travelling post office up to the time of departure of the train. These mails are due at Aberdeen forty minutes earlier, at Inverness one hour and forty minutes earlier, and at other places in proportion.

In addition to the outward dispatch from the metropolis, an equally elaborate series of trains convey the mails southwards, permitting of a much earlier delivery. There is practically no restriction as to the size of letters. The scale of postage applicable to letters between 2 oz. and 12 oz. in weight is continued without limit. The letter postage advances as follows:—For the first ounce, 1d.; for 2 oz., 1½d.; for all greater weights, 1d. for every 2 oz., plus a penny. Consequently, letters weighing over 12 oz. will be accepted at the following rates of postage:—Above 12 oz., under 14 oz., 4½d.; above 14 oz., under 16 oz., 5d.; above 16 oz., under 18 oz., 5½d.; above 18 oz., under 20 oz., 6d.; above 20 oz., under 22 oz., 6½d.; above 22 oz., under 24 oz., 7d.; and so on at the rate of ½d. for every additional 2 oz. The parcel post is extended to places abroad, at the same rates as for India, Gibraltar, and Egypt, and the insurance of registered postal packets, and also of parcels. The West India mails are dispatched regularly every two weeks—i.e., on each alternate Thursday, commencing at the end of July, instead of on the 2nd and 17th of each month. Another important change is, that an insurance can be effected upon parcels up to £10; and, above all, the long-promised 6d. telegrams came into operation on Oct. 1, 1885.

TELEGRAMS.

Charge for twelve words 6d., inclusive of address of sender and receiver; for twenty-four words 1s., inclusive of address. If, therefore, the address requires six words, the message must consist of eighteen words only for 1s., in place of twenty as heretofore.

INLAND BOOK POST.

The postage is one halfpenny for every 2 oz. or part of that weight. A packet posted wholly unpaid is charged with double the book postage; and if posted partially prepaid, with double the deficiency.

COLONIAL AND FOREIGN BOOK POST.

The limit of size for a book-packet addressed to any place abroad is 24 in. in length and 12 in. in width or depth. The postage is 1s. a pound.

FOREIGN CARD POST.

The postage of a card is in every case one half the rate for a single letter. Foreign post-cards with an impressed stamp of 1d. and 1½d. each are sold at that rate, and are transmissible to all Continental countries of the Postal Union.

REGISTRATION (INLAND AND FOREIGN).

The fee for registering a letter, newspaper, or book-packet passing between any two places in the United Kingdom is twopence.

INDIAN PARCEL POST.

1. Persons wishing to send parcels to any part of British India and Burmah can now do so.
2. The charge for parcels is 1s. per lb. or fraction of 1 lb., covering transit from London to destination in India.

POSTAL ORDERS.

Postal orders, for certain fixed sums from 1s. up to £1, are issued to the public at all post offices at which money-order business is transacted.

The following are the amounts for which postal orders are issued, together with the poundage payable in respect of each order:—

Amount of Order.	Poundage.	Amount of Order.	Poundage.
1s. 0d. ...	... ½d.	7s. 6d. ...	... 1d.
1s. 6d. ...	... ½d.	10s. 0d. ...	... 2d.
2s. 6d. ...	... 1d.	20s. 0d. ...	... 2d.

The person to whom a postal order is issued must, before parting with it, fill in the name of the money-order office at which the amount is to be paid.

MONEY ORDERS.

The commission on Inland Money Orders is:—
For sums under 10s., 2d.; 10s. and under £2, 3d.; £2 and under £3, 4d.; £3 and under £4, 5d.; £4 and under £5, 6d.; £5 and under £6, 7d.; £6 and under £7, 8d.; £7 and under £8, 9d.; £8 and under £9, 10d.; £9 and under £10, 11d.; £10, 1s.

POST-OFFICE SAVINGS BANKS.

Post-Office Savings Banks are established at all money-order offices in the United Kingdom, and are open for the receipt and payment of money and for the transaction of Government Stock business daily during the hours appointed for money-order business.

THE PARCELS POST.

The following are the general conditions in regard to weight, dimensions, rates, and time of postage:—

FOR AN INLAND POSTAL PARCEL of a weight		The rate of postage, to be prepaid in ordinary postage-stamps—
Not exceeding 1 lb. ...	... 3 lb. ...	0s. 3d.
Exceeding 1 lb. and not exceeding 3 lb. ...	... 5 lb. ...	0s. 6d.
... 3 lb. ...	... 5 lb. ...	0s. 9d.
... 5 lb. ...	... 7 lb. ...	1s. 0d.