

WEST INDIES MARITIME MAIL - PRE 1842

SWIMMER & MERCHANT SHIP



This is part of a small extant correspondence of four letters from **St Vincent, the earliest known correspondence from St Vincent**, to St Augustine, Florida in 1772. They were written by Robert Barrie, a civilian doctor attached to the army to put down the Carib revolt over “land grabbing”. They were addressed to his pregnant wife, Dolly, in Florida, where in times of peace he had a practice. Two of the four have no markings,(this is one) the first went to Boston and then worked its way south through very primitive Colonial roads to New York, Philadelphia, Suffolk in Virginia, Charlestown and finally St Augustine, and the fourth has markings from Pensacola, capital of West Florida.

The second letter written on 13th October and the third letter (this one) written on 9th December at Grand Sable bear no markings. According to the contents *“I shall enclose this in a letter to Gordon..... on account of the danger of losing them in the surf I’m obliged to put my letters in a bottle and have a negroe to swim of to the schooner that carries them to Kingstown”*. From there it would have gone to Jamaica from where feeder packet services went to Vera Cruz, Tampico and Pensacola. Clearly the fourth cover went by this route, and it is probable that this letter did so as well, with postal markings on the outer cover. It arrived in St Augustine on 17th February 1773, the same day as the first letter and the day Dolly had her baby. Ex Glassco.

SHIP LETTERS EX THE WEST INDIES 1755-1842

BARBADOS TO PORTSMOUTH



A letter from the Ashburner correspondence written on 16th October 1780 describing the destruction of Bridgetown by a hurricane. It was endorsed "P. Express" but there was nothing express-like about the transit, as the letter was back stamped with a Bishop Mark in London on 11th January – 89 days. The packet "Express" was serving the West Indies at the time but as the cover was struck with a Portsmouth Ship Letter mark (Robertson S 1) it was presumably a different vessel. The cover was charged 4d -1d ship letter and 3d for 72 miles inland to London. Here another 4d was added for the above 80 miles to Ulverston- In all 8d

BARBADOS TO LIVERPOOL OR MARYPORT



Another letter from the same correspondence written on 17th December 1782 describing the great fleet assembled at Barbados. It was nominated to go "P. the Harriett, Capt Jackson via Liverpool". It may have gone via Liverpool and if so it was struck with a very distorted S2 hand stamp, but the first two letters look like "MA", in which case it would represent an unknown Ship Letter from **Maryport**. In the case of both towns the charge of 4d makes sense- 1d ship letter and 3d inland for under 80 miles. The "1 N Three" rate I cannot explain, unless it is the total amount due from the Ashburner's on that delivery.

"GREAT WESTERN" – R.M.S.P. WEST INDIES CONTRACT

When the Great Western Steamship Co ceased trading as a result of the stranding of the "Great Britain" in Dundrum Bay the "Great Western" was sold to the Royal Mail Steam Packet Co for whom she made her first departure to the West Indies in June 1847. Initially she was used as a Main Line steamer taking the mail to Barbados, Grenada, Jacmel, Jamaica, Havana, Vera Cruz and Tampico before returning on the same route. Then she initiated the short lived service to New York, but as she grew older she spent more and more time as a branch steamer: for instance in 1852/3 she did not see Southampton for over a year. She transferred to the South America service in the second half of 1853.



A wrapper that was given to the British Postal agent in Havana and back stamped there on 10th August 1847. It was sent by M Lecumberry , addressed to Frederick Huth in London It was put on the "Great Western" on her maiden return voyage for the company, leaving Havana on the 11th and arriving in Southampton on 5th September. The rate was 2/3d per ½ oz and the letter was charged 4/6d as a double. There are no Packet or Ship Letter marks, and nothing to substantiate it, but it is assumed the letter was sent unpaid and the addressee had to pay. It was back stamped in London the same day as the "Great Western" arrived at Southampton.

"GREAT WESTERN" – R.M.S.P. WEST INDIES CONTRACT



An entire concerning the shipment of some textiles to Bermuda which was written in London on 30th September 1848. It was posted at Cheapside unpaid, and charged 1/- as a ½ oz letter. It was back stamped on 2nd October. At that time "**Great Western**" was operating as a main line steamer. She left Southampton the same day and arrived in Bermuda on the 20th.

"Great Western" continued to Nassau, Havana, New Orleans, Vera Cruz and Tampico where she arrived on the 10th November. She then returned along the same route arriving in Southampton on the 22nd December. **This routing only existed for a short time from November 1847 – September 1850 and was the last occasion that Bermuda and New Orleans had a direct service by Royal Mail.**

"GREAT WESTERN" - R.M.S.P. WEST INDIES CONTRACT

over three ounces

8/-

Thomas Purvis Esq
35 Old Broad Street
London

Packet
23rd Dec 1849

WEST INDIA AND MEXICAN MAILS.

SOUTHAMPTON, JAN. 20.

The Royal Mail Steam-packet Company's ship **Great Western**, Captain H. J. Wolfe, arrived here this morning at 10 o'clock, bringing the usual British and foreign West Indian and Mexican mails, in charge of Lieutenant Kiddle, R.N., Admiralty Agent. Her latest dates are as follows:—

| | | | |
|------------------------------|-----------|--------------------|---------|
| Vera Cruz ... | Dec. 17 | Bridgetown (Barb.) | Dec. 29 |
| Temples A. ... | (no mail) | doe) | — 23 |
| Mobile point ... | Dec. 21 | Grenada ... | — 24 |
| Havannah ... | — 23 | St. Vincent ... | — 24 |
| Nassau (Bahamas) ... | — 30 | St. Lucia ... | — 29 |
| Belize (Honduras) ... | — 11 | Martinique ... | — 30 |
| Puerto Cabello ... | — 19 | Guadaloupe ... | — 30 |
| St. Jago de Cuba ... | — 18 | Demerara ... | — 30 |
| Kingston (Jamaica) ... | — 23 | Antigua ... | — 30 |
| Jacmel (Hayti) ... | — 15 | Momberrat ... | — 30 |
| Pan Juan (Porto Rico) ... | — 24 | Nevis ... | — 31 |
| Berlice ... | — 18 | St. Kitt's ... | — 31 |
| Georgetown (Demerara) ... | — 19 | Tortola ... | — 31 |
| Telago ... | — 30 | St. Thomas ... | Jan. 1 |
| Port of Spain (Trinidad) ... | — 21 | Bermuda ... | — 7 |

The **Great Western**, having received the Gulf of Mexico mails from the Thames, sailed from Bermuda on the 7th inst., and has consequently made a very rapid run from that island (3,013 miles) in 12½ days. Her outward voyage was performed in 14½ days, both passages being the quickest on record.

A wrapper posted in Kingston, Jamaica on 22nd December 1849 addressed to London. This was a heavy letter endorsed top left "over three ounces" and was charged 8/- (two rates of 1/- for the 1st oz and then 2 rates per oz or part oz thereafter). This was the weekly wage for a labourer in 1850. The "Great Western" left Kingston on the 23rd, but then toured the West Indies before finally leaving for Southampton from Bermuda on the 7th January 1850. She arrived on the 20th and the Times recorded that both her outward voyage of 14 ½ days and her homeward voyage of 12 ¾ days were the quickest on record. Besides the mail she carried 23 passengers, £54,000 of specie, cochineal, cigars, tobacco, arrowroot, sponges and live turtle; without the mail subsidy almost certainly a loss making voyage. Ex Tabcart.

"GREAT WESTERN" – R.M.S.P. WEST INDIES CONTRACT



Two unpaid covers, one from Jamaica the other to Jamaica in 1852. The first was written at Newmarket, posted at Port Morant on 6th January and back stamped in Kingston on the 7th. The **"Great Western" acting as branch steamer was delayed because bad weather meant her boats could not cross the bar at Tampico** and she did not leave Kingston until the 17th. She arrived in St Thomas on the 23rd and transferred the mail to the "Trent", which arrived in Southampton on 9th February. The recipient in London had to pay **the rate of 1/2d which applied to letters originating outside Kingston.**

The second was posted in Berwick on 27th March and put on the "Great Western". She departed Southampton on 2nd April and arrived at St Thomas on the 23rd. The branch steamer "Thames" departed the following day and arrived in Jamaica on the 27th. It was back stamped at Rodney Hall the same day with the recipient paying the single rate outside Kingston of 1/2d. **The letter refers to the anxiety created by the loss of the "Amazon" on her maiden voyage.**

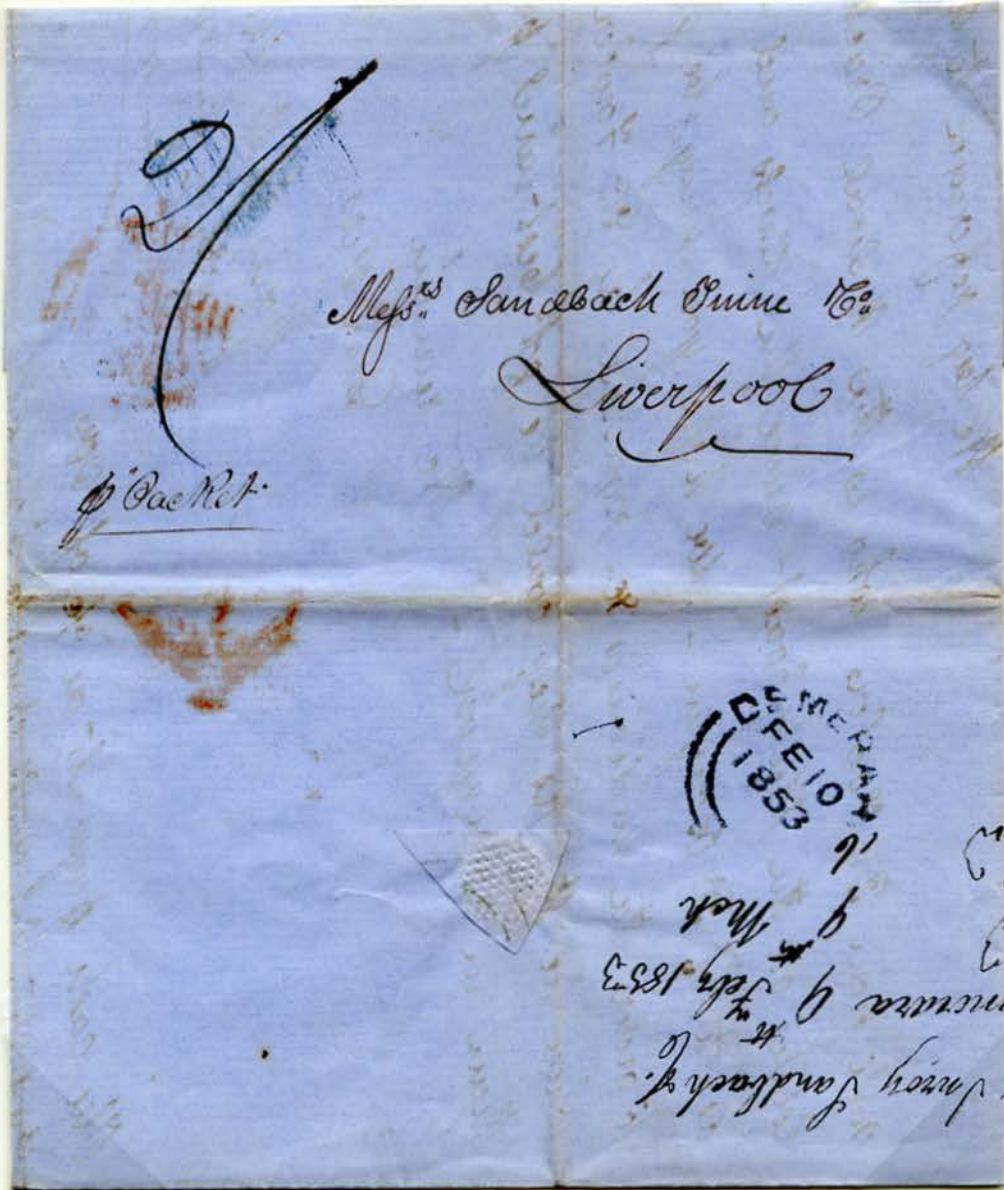
“GREAT WESTERN” – R.M.S.P. WEST INDIES CONTRACT



A wrapper from Fouche Freres in Valparaiso, Chile, to Bordeaux endorsed with a hand stamp "Via Panama y Inglaterra". It was dated 15th August 1852 and was carried to Panama by the Pacific Steam Navigation vessel, "Bogota" on her second voyage. She called at Callao en route and arrived at Panama on 4th September. Here it was struck with a "Panama Transit" hand stamp and put on the "Great Western" acting as a Branch steamer in Chagres (Colon). She left on the 9th and arrived at St Thomas on the 14th via Cartagena. The letter was transferred to "La Plata" on the 16th and arrived at Southampton on the 29th.

The letter then went through London on the 30th, Calais and Paris on 1st October and arrived in Bordeaux on the 3rd. Along the way it was charged 21 decimes. In London it should have been struck with "Colonies & Art 13" to establish the bulk rate of 3/4d per oz created by the 1843 Convention paid to the U.K. by France.

"GREAT WESTERN" – R.M.S.P. WEST INDIES CONTRACT



An entire from the Sandbach Tinne correspondence which originated in Demerary (British Guiana) on 9th February 1853. It contained a list of medical requirements and an engineering drawing, now not present, and so **was rated as a 1 oz letter**. It was put on the "Great Western" acting as branch steamer which left on 10th February and arrived at St Thomas on the 16th. Mail was transferred to the "Orinoco" which left on the 21st and arrived in Southampton on 9th March. It was back stamped in Liverpool the same day when the recipient had to pay 2/-.

"GREAT WESTERN" – R.M.S.P. WEST INDIES CONTRACT



Two unpaid letters to France. The first was given to the British Postal agency in Havana, Cuba on 27th July 1849. It was put on the "Great Western" acting as branch steamer on the 28th and transferred to the "Avon" at Bermuda on 7th August. She arrived in Southampton on the 21st. It went through London a day later where it received a strike of the "Colonies &c Art13" hand stamp indicating that it was being transferred to France at the bulk rate of 2 francs per 30 grams. It arrived in Boulogne on the 23rd where it was rated as a double with 30 decimes to pay. There is no arrival date in Paris.

The second was posted in Cayenne, French Guiana on 18th March 1853. Mail from French Guiana to Britain had to be prepaid, but as it was directed via Demerara and presumably paid to Georgetown it could be put on board unpaid. The "Trent" acting as branch steamer left Georgetown on the 25th and arrived in Barbados on the 27th, where the cover was transferred to the "Great Western". She arrived in Southampton on 22nd March on her last voyage on the West Indies station as a main line steamer. There is no London date and no accounting mark but on arrival in Calais it was charged 30 decimes, the 15 gram rate, and delivered in Bordeaux via Paris on the 25th. H. 1000