

CAPE OF GOOD HOPE.

REPORT of the POSTMASTER-GENERAL for the Year 1873.

Presented to both Houses of Parliament by command of His Excellency the Governor.

1874.

General Post Office, Cape Town, 16th May, 1874.

The Honourable the Colonial Secretary.

SIR,—I have the honour to submit my report on the Postal Service of this Colony for the year 1873.

G. W. AITCHISON, Postmaster-General.

REPORT.

It is gratifying to be able to report that steady progress continues to be made in this department, the revenue being in excess of that of the previous year by £7,392. Fifty-five new post offices have been opened, and the number of them now amounts to three hundred and seventy-nine. Several new mail services have been established. One by passenger cart between Port Elizabeth and Somerset East *via* the Zuurbergen, another by Cobb and Co.'s coaches from Graham's Town to Colesberg *via* Cradock. Both of these, at comparatively little cost, have afforded the advantages of postal communication along lines of country hitherto altogether unprovided for, or otherwise very inefficiently so. Additional postal facilities, between Graham's Town, Fort Beaufort, and Queen's Town, have been afforded by the employment of the passenger cart running between those places; and by changes in the days and hours of the dispatch of posts many post towns have had increased and improved communication without any additional expense to the department.

Arrangements are now being made for giving additional postal facilities to Namaqualand by means of the coasting steamers and the railway belonging to the Copper Mining Company. For some time back mails for Port Nolloth have been regularly forwarded by the coasting packets. Advantage has also been taken of the Inland Transport Company's wagons, leaving on Tuesday mornings, for the conveyance of an additional mail to Hope Town and the Diamond-fields, by which means an opportunity is given to Cape Town for corresponding with those places at more equal intervals of the week than when solely dependent upon the post carts, one of which leaves on Friday morning, and the other on Saturday afternoon. It has been an object with me for some time back to remedy this anomaly of the Diamond-fields posts leaving so closely upon each other, but dependent as they are upon effecting a junction at certain points on the line of road with the posts from Port Elizabeth and other Eastern Frontier towns, I have not yet been enabled to decide upon any change for effecting this end. I was, therefore, glad to avail myself of the Inland Transport Company's services for the conveyance of a third mail early in the week, and I am now in correspondence with a view to secure for the Eastern commercial towns the same advantages, either by means of the passenger coaches or by more direct

means—the chief obstacle in the way of which is the unwillingness hitherto shown by the Free State Government to allow sealed mails to pass through their territory. Seeing, however, that this policy has been the means of diverting the Transvaal postal service to another channel, and that postal communication with the Free State itself must necessarily be impaired by denying itself the opportunities the conveyances passing through it would afford of receiving and dispatching mails from and to this Colony, I have every hope that this hindrance will soon be removed.

My predecessor in his report last year urged the establishment of a daily post between Cape Town and Port Elizabeth, mainly in order to relieve the post cart of the bulk and weight of mails, which had increased to an enormous extent. Accordingly measures were taken for initiating this service in January last. At the time the contractors tendered for this service, they had no reason to apprehend that the approaching season, when they were to enter upon their engagements, would be so trying. For the first few weeks of the new contracts the mails reached Cape Town with regularity, but they were scarcely once in time in reaching Port Elizabeth, where it was more important they should be punctual, dependent as the up-country mails are for their dispatch upon the arrival at Graham's Town of the Port Elizabeth post. The contractors for the daily service for stages of sixty hours out of the seventy-two between Cape Town and Port Elizabeth had hardly entered upon their work when they gave notice of termination of contract, as they were beginning to suffer seriously from horse-sickness; and, moreover, found that with the unfavourable season, owing to the drought, forage had become scarce, and risen so in price, that the terms upon which they had taken the contracts were not only unremunerative, but would entail upon them a heavy loss. Fresh tenders had accordingly to be invited for these two stages, and at the same time, upon my representation that if the daily post were to be of real benefit to the Frontiers it ought to be extended to Graham's Town, the point from which the Eastern mails diverge, tenders were called for three additional posts a week from Port Elizabeth to Graham's Town. By the time these tenders were received, the conduct of the daily service had grown worse and worse. The Lange Kloof had been visited with a succession of heavy floods, and the contractor there was found utterly unequal to his engagements, the result of which was a complete derangement of postal communication with the post towns beyond Port Elizabeth.

The Government were accordingly obliged to take the conveyance of the mails from Blanco to Humansdorp into their own hands; and seeing that the cost involved in continuing the daily post, with its extension to Graham's Town, would amount to £24,000 per annum, decided upon reverting to the tri-weekly post.

This decision was quite in accordance with my own views, as set forth in a memorandum addressed to the Government, and which are briefly these: That the avowed object of my predecessor in the establishment of the daily post, namely, the relief of the post cart from being overburdened, was to a great measure frustrated by discontinuing the use of the coasting packets, which perform the distance between Cape Town and Port Elizabeth in one-third less time than the post can. That at the time he urged this measure, the steamers were in the habit of lying over for some time in Table Bay, while now, as a general rule, they seldom remain longer than forty-eight hours. That considering the daily post ran parallel to the coast, and only as far as Port Elizabeth, it seemed calculated more for increasing postal communication between Cape Town and Port Elizabeth, and the intervening post towns, than to afford advantages to the inland Frontier Districts, whose interests were sought to be served by its establishment. And lastly, that the cost involved in continuing it was altogether incommensurate with the advantages resulting from it, even if it should be conveyed with the utmost punctuality.

Had the initiatory season of the daily post been at all favourable, there was no reason why it should not have been conducted quite as well as the tri-weekly

service was when it was substituted for the weekly service, and with its extension to Graham's Town, and the use at the same time of the coasting packets, it would have allowed the department to arrange for the dispatch of the mails from certain important points, such as Port Elizabeth, Graham's Town, &c., at regular and fixed hours, eventually leading to the conveyance of the mails between the inland towns much more frequently than at present, and at a considerable reduction in cost, as if the dispatches of mail carts could be relied on, passenger traffic would increase, and a proportionate abatement be made in the charge for conveyance of mails. As things are now, with the limited number of posts, the dispatch of one mail is contingent upon the arrival of another, and the contractor has mainly to look for his profit to the Government allowance for the conveyance of mails; and only very partially to any returns from passenger and parcel traffic. However much, for these reasons, it is a matter of regret with me to be instrumental in reducing postal communication, I think in the present juncture it was a wise step to withdraw the daily post, leaving it open at some more favourable time to renew the experiment, when it may be tried with a better prospect of success with the experience gained by this temporary failure.

As a criterion of the difficulties the mail-contractors have had to contend with, I may mention that within the last six months contracts have been thrown up, representing the conveyance of mails weekly over an extent of 4,638 miles.

I append some statistics of the department, which, I think, will be of interest, as serving to show the amount of work done during the past year.

The mail matter dispatched inland from Cape Town was as follows :—

Letters	611,760
Papers	676,483
Books	43,446

The weight of mails dispatched by coasting steamers ... 31,821lbs.

By post cart to Eastern Frontier 89,547lbs.

By North Eastern post cart 49,304lbs.

Being 35,080lbs in all in excess of the weight conveyed in 1872.

During the last six months 2,773lbs. have been conveyed by the transport wagons.

The number of bags of mail received by the Union packets during the year amounted to 1,641, and those by the Donald Currie line to 184.

The mails dispatched to England consisted of

Letters	176,882
Papers	158,292
Books.....	11,948

Of which 54,194 letters, 25,662 papers, and 2,580, books were forwarded by private steamers. The number of letters received by private steamers from England amounted to 30,230, or 4,252 in excess of those received in 1872, showing that correspondents are beginning to learn the existence of the cheap postage line; but how gradually may be inferred from the fact that in a large city like Lincoln, containing about 150,000 inhabitants, the Postmaster and his clerks disputed with Mr. Tweed, the Secretary of this Department, when on a visit to that city last month, that a letter could be sent to the Cape Colony at any other than the shilling rate. It will be seen that the number of letters dispatched from the Colony by private steamers nearly double the number of those received.

Registered Letters.

The number of registered letters received in the General Post Office was:

From and <i>via</i> England	4,020
From other places beyond sea	155
From inland towns	8,804

And those despatched

To and <i>via</i> England	4,904
To other places beyond sea	141
To inland towns	3,774

The number of letters containing coin and other valuables put into the Post Office *unregistered*, and compulsorily registered by the officers of the department, amounted in all to the very large number of 411, of which 351 were addressed to places inland, and sixty to England. I wish to call the particular attention of the public to this fact, and to caution them against the continuance of the practice of such careless transmission of coin, &c., for which there is no excuse, when they have the means of securing themselves, and guarding others against temptation, either by making their remittances by money order, or by paying the trifling fee of fourpence for having their letters registered.

Dead Letters.

The number of colonial unclaimed letters returned to the writers during the year has been 8,210, yielding a postage of £100 7s. 8d.; and the number of letters from England and foreign parts returned as *dead letters* to the countries in which they originated amounted to 2,300.

Money Orders.

Money Order Offices have been established at Hondeklip Bay, Port Nolloth, and Wellington, making the number in the Colony now fifty-three.

The issues upon the respective offices during the year were as follows, being £2,824 in excess of those for last year:

						Premiums.			
Upon offices in Cape Colony	£49,328	13	4	....	£639	3	2		
Upon offices in the United Kingdom .	9,906	15	3	....	336	8	8		
Upon offices at St. Helena	700	19	3	....	23	12	0		
Upon offices in Natal	138	7	6	....	3	17	0		
Upon offices in Griqualand West....	686	14	3	....	8	3	0		
Total	£60,761	9	7	....	£1,011	3	10		

Revenue and Expenditure.

The expenditure of the department for the past year has been as follows:

Conveyance of mails	£51,395	5	2
Salaries	9,533	7	8
Allowances	1,645	0	2
Contingencies	723	8	8
Total	£63,297	1	8

The revenue was as follows:

Postage	£41,478	12	2
Fines	1,935	2	6
Premiums on money orders	909	12	11
Total	£44,323	7	7

Showing a deficiency in the revenue to meet the expenditure of £18,973 14s. 1d., but in this statement no allowance is made for the work done by the department in the conveyance of the *Government Gazette*, and of official correspondence.

To form some estimate of the extent of this service I procured returns from the great majority of the post office of the number and weight of official letters dispatched from each of them during last January. The returns show the number of letters to have been 15,245, and the weight 3,632lbs.

Allowing that the return for that month would necessarily be large, being that during which the quarterly returns are received, I take 3,000lbs. as the average weight of official letters conveyed each month, and estimating this at the usual rates of postage, the service rendered by the Post Office Department to the Government may be set down at £19,200, and the Postal Department may, therefore, be said to pay its own expenses.

In the item for expenditure on conveyance of mails is included £4,449 2s. 11d. for District or Field-Cornets' posts. These posts mostly run fortnightly, and exist more for the administrative purposes of the Government than for postal communication. I trust, however, that by next year they will be converted into weekly posts, be made more generally useful to the public, and subservient to the objects of the department by which their expense has to be borne.

G. W. AITCHISON,

Postmaster-General.