

Post Office / Hong Kong 1841/2 handstamp Webb type 3 survey (Feb. 2026) by Dr. Andrew Cheung FRPSL. AIEP

Discovery of two previously unrecorded Webb type 3 letters in 2014 and 2016 prompted me to update the joint article titled 'Post Office Hong Kong 1841 – The "Gee" piece unfolded' by Lee Scamp and myself. The original article can be read in HKPS August 2011 newsletter.

For detailed analysis of these covers please refer to the excellent article 'Postal Matters at Macao and Hong Kong 1840 – 1842' by Richard Whittington in HKPS Journal 26, May 2022. For more information regarding first post offices of Hong Kong please refer to the joint article by Richard Whittington and Pamela Pang in HKPS Journal 30, March 2026.

POST OFFICE HONG KONG 1841 handstamp

"Post Office/Hong Kong/1841" is a rare marking! To date, only one letter is known. This is the famous "R. Owen" letter on board HM cutter *Louisa* to Macao or Canton. An item once graced the Ishikawa Hong Kong collection which went under the hammer at Sotheby's in 1980 and later in Zurich Asia sale. This item is currently residing in Hongkong Post's archive.



Although the itinerary and postage rate of all the 1841/2 letters have been well studied, no conclusion has yet been made to what the handstamp is made of. The illustration on a 1992 \$1.80 commemorative stamp issued by Hong Kong Post Office and the front cover of the China Philatelic Association publication suggests that it is made of some kind of metal.

However, analysis of the quality of the strike on known letters and pieces suggests that it could have been made of a softer material like ivory which was commonly used for carving company seals at the time. A metal handstamp would have made visible indentation on the letter surface upon striking.



POST OFFICE HONG KONG 1842 handstamp

In 1842, Webb type 3 was re-used with "1" in 1841 removed and "2" inserted by hand. Among the known covers and pieces, it is struck either in red with an orange hue or in pinkish red. There are also two types of manuscript "2", likely written by different individuals.

Eight letters have been recorded with POHK 1842 handstamp. The recorded date quoted here is the date written or annotated on the letter and not the date when the handstamp was applied at Hong Kong. Aside from two letters which originated from Hong Kong, the others are letters passing through Hong Kong and handled by the post office.

The following EIGHT letters have been recorded:-



Letter 1

Dated 28 March 1842
Incoming letter from England to Captain Marquis on ship *Thames* of the China Expedition. Redirected from HK to Macao, Calcutta and finally Madras by Dent's ship *Waterwitch*.

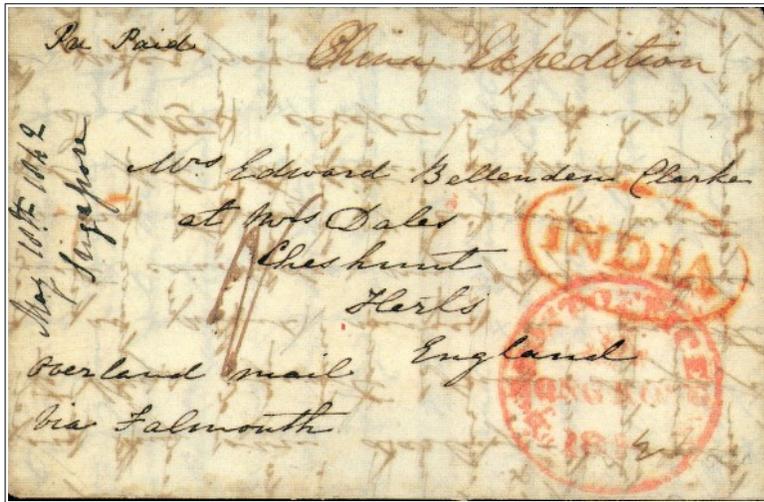
Provenance: Canman, Hutchinson, Pearson, Ishikawa, W.H.Lu, John Parker



Letter 2

Dated 9 May 1842
Letter from Clement Edwards 'just in the way off Chusan' to Weston Super Mare. Rated 1/- on arrival.

Provenance: Sussex, Beckeman, Dr. John Ma.
Current owner – Francis Au.



Letter 3

Dated 18 May 1842
 Letter from Edward Bellenden Clarke of *HMS Thalia* in Singapore sent via HK and India to Cheshunt. Rated 1/- on arrival.

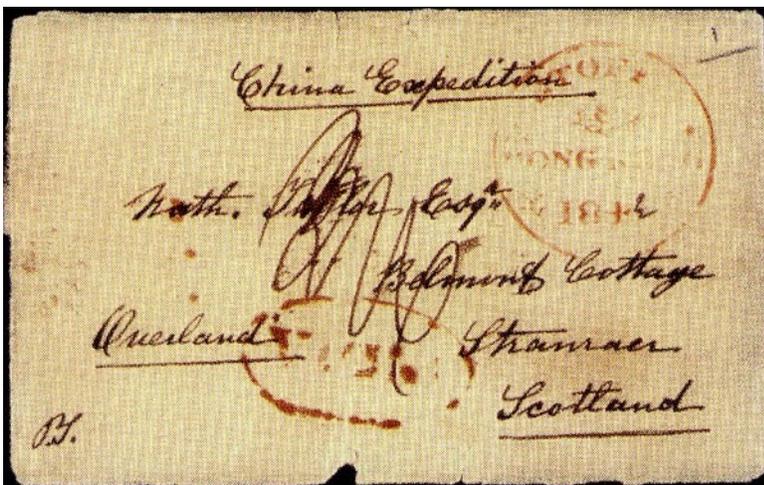
Provenance: Richard Chan.



Letter 4

Dated 22 May 1842
 Letter by Lt. Taylor, *HMS Blonde* at Chusan to Stranraer, Scotland. Rated 8d on arrival.

Provenance: Ritchie Bodily, Spink Connaught II sale October 2024, Current owner – Prof. PC Shaw.



Letter 5

Dated 6 June 1842
 China Expedition letter by Lt. Taylor to Stranraer, Scotland. Rated 3/6 on arrival.

Provenance: Houston, Cranford, Burghard, Peter Shek. Current keeper – Hong Kong Museum of History collection.



Letter 6

Mailed 25 June 1842
Reverend Joset at Hong
Kong to Father Libois,
Procurator of French
Mission in Macao.
Sent postage free.

Provenance: David Feldman
2014 auction.



Letter 7

June 1842, Admiral Parker
at Hong Kong to Captain
Smith of *HMS Druid* at
Bombay. Envelope without
content.
2017 BPA certificate.

Provenance: CG 2016 auction,
Spink January 2026 auction.



Letter 8

Dated August 1842
Letter by Senior Captain
Coulson of *HMS Blonde* to
Felton sent via India.
Paid 1 rupee and rated 3/6
on arrival.

Provenance: Milo D. Rowell, sold
by Christie's

Fragments

In addition to the eight letters mentioned above, there are four pieces (cut-outs) known from letters addressed to A.R. Johnston in Macao. Two styles of the m/s "2" can be seen:-

1. Cut square piece showing the word "Esqre." (Figure 1) Provenance: Peter Shek, David Feldman Peter Shek sale.
2. The "worm-eaten" irregular piece previously folded up with "...ston" and "M..acao" just visible (Figure 2). Provenance: E.F. Gee, CRL London 1989, "Clement Edwards" collection JB2011, now in author's collection.
3. A piece in the Macao Postal and Telecommunication Museum collection showing the word "Macao" (Figure 3)
4. A piece showing "...ton Esqre." overstruck by the marking (Figure 4). Provenance: Erle, CRL Zurich, April 1984



Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3

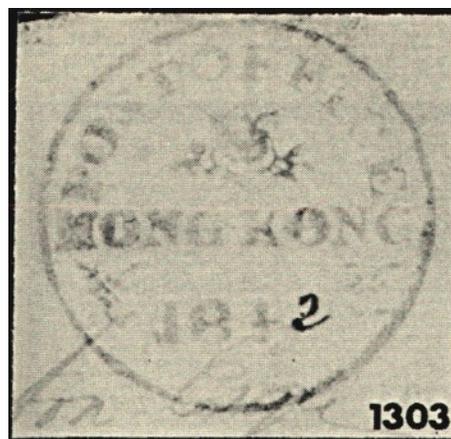


Figure 4

Doubtful items

An article by Peter Shek published in the 1969 Festival of Hong Kong Stamp Exhibition catalogue mentions another handstamp on piece in the J.B. Shaw collection (Figure 5). The illustration is in black and white and the handstamp is worded: Post Office/Hong Kong/1846. By 1846, datestamps sent from London namely Webb type 7 and 9 were already in use thus there is no reason why Hong Kong Post Office could have brought back an undated cachet. Therefore, it is doubtful whether this handstamp on piece is genuine.

Other forged covers and forged strike on pieces have been recorded. Illustrated here are two examples in recent years. The handstamp is usually in black but also in red. The strike in red on piece is particularly dangerous, it is a high-tech modern forgery (Figure 6).

Figure 7 shows an entire-letter from Paris to Blois, France with fake POHK 1841 and Calcutta Paid datestamp added. The endorsement "Via India" does not belong.



Figure 5



Figure 6



Figure 7

Acknowledgment

First of all, I would like to thank Dr. Jeffrey Schneider and Neill Granger for sharing their extensive records and opinion about the letters they had handled. I am particularly indebted to Richard Whittington and Pamela Pang for their in depth research in the early history of the Hong Kong Post Office. My thanks also to owners and auction houses allowing me to show images of their property in this article. My apologies for missing those names past and present unknown to me who have found great pride owning this crown jewel in their Hong Kong collection. Lastly, this is by no means the last survey as new finds in future – genuine and forged, will prompt further updates.