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# The Origin of Postage Stamps.

*THE FACTS CONNECTED WITH THEIR INTRODUCTION  
INTO THE UNITED KINGDOM.*

THE CHALMERS CRAZE INVESTIGATED.

*(SECOND EDITION.)*

BY

PEARSON HILL.

*(Late of the Secretary's Office, General Post Office, London.)*



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# THE CHALMERS CRAZE.

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IN this paper, which I have been asked to write, and have written mainly for the purpose of again exposing the cowardly attacks on the memory of my father, the late Sir Rowland Hill, that have been circulated and persisted in during the last seven years by a Mr. Patrick Chalmers, it is, perhaps, well that I should commence by explaining why I have so long treated them with silent contempt.

As Lord Salisbury recently pointed out, repeated contradictions of slanders are only useful where false charges have been made in good faith—they are almost useless when the utterer has other objects than the truth in view.

More than six years ago, in a paper which I read before the London Philatelic Society, published in the *Philatelic Record* of November 1881, I fully exposed the worthless character of the claim set up by Mr. P. Chalmers.

Five years ago, in the *Dundee Advertiser*, of 16th April 1883, I, for the fifth time, publicly charged Mr. Patrick Chalmers with publishing a false and garbled version of the letters which had passed between us, and then dared him to take the only course by which a man so charged can clear his character, viz., by an action for libel, if my charges were untrue.

That upon this point there may be no possible misunderstanding, I here reproduce that portion of my letter in the *Dundee Advertiser* to which I have referred:

“One more fact will, perhaps, be sufficient to give your readers a clear insight into this case. The libels which Mr. Patrick Chalmers has for years past persisted in manufacturing and circulating against the character of the late Sir Rowland Hill, are such as I am wholly powerless to bring under the notice of the Courts of Law, as in this country the law of libel, unfortunately, furnishes no protection to the memory of the dead. No such obstacle, however, stands in Mr. Patrick Chalmers' way as regards the charges I have made against him. He well knows that, if the accusations in my letter of 30th December 1880, were untrue, he would not only be able to claim heavy



damages and costs, but he would have, what any honest man in his position would value far more, namely, the finest possible opportunity of asserting his father's claims by bringing the question before a tribunal where every statement must be made on oath, and be subject to the severest scrutiny. Your readers will know how to value the statements of a man who, while professing to desire full investigation, neglects so admirable an opportunity, and prefers to put up with so serious an imputation on his veracity—consoling himself with cowardly and contemptible insinuations against the character of a dead man, whom the whole world has recognised as a public benefactor, well knowing that he can pursue this course without subjecting himself to any legal penalty."

Beyond putting forward mere blank denials, worthless from a man still under such a public stigma, Mr. Patrick Chalmers has never ventured to take any step to meet these serious charges—all his recent assertions that the facts were long ago investigated by impartial authorities and decided in his favour being absolutely untrue.

Having thus years ago exposed the character both of the claim and of the claimant, I have long refused to take any notice of him or of his persistent and ridiculous misstatements, well knowing that any one who took the trouble to compare Mr. Patrick Chalmers' pretended quotations with the real Parliamentary or official documents, would require no help from me to detect their untruthfulness, but as history which is five years old is, as a rule, scarcely so well known as the events of the Norman Conquest, the exposure of Mr. Patrick Chalmers' pretensions is now half forgotten, persons who have heard his side of the case only have been misled, and the time, perhaps, has arrived when a re-statement of the real facts may be useful.

In Mr. Patrick Chalmers' more recent publications, the *suppressio veri* and *suggestio falsi* are, if possible, even more manifest than in those I had previously exposed, and I now, for the second time in five years, compel him to choose between bringing the case into the Courts of Law—where his statements must be given on oath, with the usual penalties for perjury—or of again being publicly discredited as a man whose assertions on this question are not worth the paper upon which they are written.

Had it been open for me to do so, I should long ago have brought an action against Mr. Patrick Chalmers in vindication of my father's honour, but the law of libel in this country, as already stated, affords no protection to the memory of the dead. As Mr. Justice Stephen recently declared, in a somewhat similar case (*The Queen v. Carr and Another*), "the dead have no rights"—all the more base and cowardly, therefore, are those who fabricate slanders which they well know to be untrue, but in which they can safely indulge without subjecting themselves to any other penalty than public contempt.

The charges made by Mr. Patrick Chalmers against the late Sir Rowland Hill are twofold :

Firstly, That his plan of Uniform Penny Postage was not original, but a "concealed copy" of the recommendations contained



in the Fifth Report of the Commissioners of Post Office Inquiry of April 1836; and

Secondly, That he appropriated, without acknowledgment, Mr. James Chalmers' plan of adhesive postage stamps, and kept back Mr. J. Chalmers' scheme, in order to secure to himself the credit,—these frauds, according to Mr. Patrick Chalmers, having been successfully concealed for upwards of forty years.

As no such concealment would have been possible unless Sir Rowland Hill had managed to secure the connivance not only of gentlemen like the late Mr. Robert Wallace, M.P., Mr. Joseph Hume, M.P., Mr. Henry Warburton, M.P., and many other earnest workers in the cause of postal reform, as well as that of all the Commissioners of Post Office Inquiry, and all members of the Select Committees on Postage in 1838 and 1843, and even of all his opponents in the Post Office, and of Mr. James Chalmers himself, the manifest absurdity of the statement should surely have been sufficient to insure its rejection, at all events amongst grown up gentlemen.

The first charge was six years ago shown to be not only untrue, but impossible.\* Untrue, because the plans of Sir Rowland Hill were essentially different from the recommendations of the Fifth Report. Impossible, because, as Sir Rowland Hill submitted his plans (in February, 1837) to the identical Commissioners who in the previous April had signed that Report, there could have been no concealment, even had there been anything to conceal. Upon this point, therefore, the mere restatement of the facts is sufficient to refute the charge.

The second charge is equally disproved, not only by the fact shown six years ago † that Mr. James Chalmers' suggestions were several months later in date than Sir Rowland Hill's proposals, but because in this case also, Mr. James Chalmers' paper of 8th February 1838 (containing his plan) having been published in full, with his name and address, in the *Post Circular* of 5th April 1838—a newspaper widely circulated—his scheme, crude though it was, was fully communicated to the public, and no concealment, therefore, was attempted, or would have been possible.

The fact that his charges against the late Sir Rowland Hill have over and over again been shown to be absolutely untrue did not in the past, and probably will not in the future, hinder Mr. Patrick Chalmers from constantly repeating them. On this question he seems to be either a monomaniac, or else to have some other object in view than mere filial devotion or love of historical research. What that object may be, it will not, perhaps, be difficult to guess, if one is really to take seriously his pointed allusions to the fact that other persons have received handsome pecuniary rewards for postal improvements, while James Chalmers was sent empty away, or if one is expected to attach weight to the paragraphs which have appeared in, at all events, one newspaper calling attention to the

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\* See *Philatelic Record*, November 1881, page 200.

† *Idem*, November 1881, page 198.



fact that the jubilee of Postal Reform (1890) is near at hand, and that valuable assistance, never required, was rendered by Mr. Patrick Chalmers' father.

The reiteration of the false charges against Sir Rowland Hill may, therefore, be expected for some time to come—possibly, indeed, Mr. Patrick Chalmers, by constant assertion, may have really deluded himself into a belief in his magnificent mare's nest—but meanwhile, as there are many persons, chiefly members of some Philatelic Societies at home or abroad, who do take an interest apparently in the purely historical question as to when and by whom adhesive postage stamps were first suggested, I have, in compliance with a request which has been made to me by some of these enthusiasts, prepared the following memorandum, which, with its references to Parliamentary and other documents, will probably afford the necessary information, and furnish sufficient evidence of Mr. Patrick Chalmers' mental condition.

PEARSON HILL.

6, Pembroke Square, London,  
19th March, 1888.

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## BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE CASE.

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For the convenience of those who have scarcely time to go link by link through the chain of evidence in the following Memorandum, I have added, at page 30, a summary of the case, which may, however, be still further condensed as follows:

Mr. (afterwards Sir) Rowland Hill proposed adhesive postage stamps in his evidence of 13th February 1837.

Mr. James Chalmers, himself, gives November 1837, as the date at which he first made his plan public.

In October 1839, unaware of Sir R. Hill's evidence above referred to, Mr. James Chalmers claimed to have originated such stamps.

In May 1840, however, after having read Sir R. Hill's evidence, Mr. James Chalmers at once withdrew his claim to priority and expressed his regret he had, in error, ever put it forward.

The untruthfulness of Mr. Patrick Chalmers' statements, by which he seeks to set aside his father's withdrawal of his claim, are also fully exposed.

18th April, 1888.



# MEMORANDUM

*As to the Facts concerning the Origin of Postage Stamps.*

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IN considering what value should be attached to any claim to have first suggested the use of adhesive labels for the prepayment of postage—whether in 1834, as is claimed for Mr. James Chalmers, or in 1837, when Mr. (afterwards Sir) Rowland Hill, in his pamphlet and evidence, proposed them—it is necessary to bear in mind how far any such suggestion had already been anticipated in this country or elsewhere.

2. The idea of collecting the postal duties chargeable on letters and other documents by means of stamps instead of money is certainly of far earlier date than 1834 or 1837. Stamped paper or covers for that purpose of several values, both with embossed and with impressed stamps, appear to have been used in the Kingdom of Sardinia about the year 1819, and, so far back as 1653, stamps were also used, or proposed to be used, for postal purposes in Paris. In both cases, however, they seem soon to have fallen into disuse, from causes which further on will be more fully explained.\*

3. In our own country, the idea of employing stamps for the prepayment of postage was revived by the late Mr. Charles Knight, the eminent publisher, about the year 1833-34. He was taking an active part in the endeavours then being made to abolish the heavy stamp duty charged upon newspapers (4d. per copy); and as a means to this end proposed that stamped covers or wrappers should be prepared to frank unstamped newspapers through the post. Nothing at the time came of Mr. Knight's suggestion; the attempt

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\* In Sardinia, the use of these stamped covers, &c., was very limited, being chiefly confined to Ministers of State. It scarcely lasted two years. In March, 1836, a formal decree was passed suppressing their further use, this decree being required simply to demonetise a large stock found unused in the Stamp Office at Turin.



to obtain the abolition of the Newspaper Stamp Duty failed, and, as newspapers were still obliged to bear the Newspaper Duty Stamp,\* whether circulating by post or not, they still retained their former privilege of free transmission as often as desired by post; and consequently (as letters were almost invariably sent unpaid) no opening for the use of postage stamps of any kind existed in this country till Sir Rowland Hill's reform created the opportunity for their employment.

4. There can be no doubt that the previous existence of stamped covers in France and Italy was wholly unknown to Mr. Charles Knight, by whom, as is often the case, an old invention was re-invented, and in Sir Rowland Hill's pamphlet, evidence, and "History of Penny Postage," the full credit for this valuable suggestion, the true germ of our present postage stamp system, has always been cordially and unreservedly given by him to Mr. Charles Knight.

5. Thus there can be no question that, long before the date at which it is alleged that Mr. James Chalmers invented adhesive postage stamps, the idea of using some kind of stamp for prepayment of postage had ceased to be a novelty. The plan had been actually tried in Italy and France, and had been recently proposed for adoption, at all events as regards newspapers, in this country.

6. Neither was there any novelty in 1834 in the idea of making stamps adhesive. Stamps or labels, to be gummed or pasted on the articles liable to the duty which the stamps represented, had for many years previously been manufactured by the Inland Revenue Department, to be affixed to bottles, boxes, and packets containing patent medicines, for the collection of the duties levied upon them under the Acts 42, George III., cap. 56, sec. 11, and 44 George III., cap. 98, schedule B. These stamped labels have, indeed, been in constant use in this country, as proved by the records of the Inland Revenue Department, ever since the year 1802.

7. To prevent any possible misunderstanding, it is right to mention that, though these medicine labels were printed several on a sheet, and when used had to be cut up and affixed to the various articles liable to duty, just as postage stamps were to letters later on, the user of these stamps had to find his own adhesive material, gum or paste, as most convenient. Hair-splitters may, therefore, perhaps, contend that these were not *adhesive* stamps, but simply stamps *that could be made to adhere*; in other words, *affixable* stamps—a distinction, however, which would be all in Sir Rowland Hill's favour—but throughout this controversy the term "adhesive postage stamp" in contradistinction to "stamped covers or wrappers," has been taken as meaning a stamp printed on a piece of paper just large enough to hold it, which can be stuck upon a letter or envelope, as distinguished from one already

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\* The compulsory Newspaper Stamp Duty was reduced to 1d. in 1836; it was not finally abolished till 1856.



impressed thereon, and it is, therefore, of little moment to the question now at issue whether the Government or the purchaser found the gum or other adhesive matter. Indeed, as Mr. James Chalmers, in his suggestions to the Treasury in 1839, abandoned the use of gum, and proposed that his labels or "slips" should be attached by the sender to the back fold of the letters with the sealing wax or wafers used to fasten them, his stamps in their final form were identical in principle with the medicine labels above described.

8. The value, therefore, of the particular suggestion now under consideration, viz., the proposal that adhesive stamps should be employed for postal as well as other purposes is narrowed to this:—

No claim can be maintained by any one to have *originated* in 1834 or in 1837 the idea that stamps instead of money should be used for the collection of postage; that idea, though practically unworkable, was nearly 200 years old.

No claim can be maintained to have then *originated* the idea of making stamps adhesive, for adhesive or affixable stamps were not only in actual daily use for fiscal purposes in 1834, but had been continuously so used in this country for more than thirty years previously.

9. The only thing left, therefore, as the bone of contention—if it be worth contending—is this: A proposal having already been made that stamped covers should again be used for prepayment of postage, who was the first afterwards to suggest that a particular and well-known form of stamp, then in common use, should also be available for postal purposes?

10. I shall show that whatever credit may be due for having made this suggestion is due to Sir Rowland Hill, and not to Mr. James Chalmers, but the facts above mentioned will sufficiently explain why I have always held that the suggestion itself was a matter of very minor detail\*—one so certain to have occurred to scores of persons, *the moment the adoption of a uniform rate of postage, coupled with prepayment, rendered the general use of stamps for postal purposes practicable*, that long ago I described it "as bearing about the same relative importance to the great features of Sir Rowland Hill's plan of postal reform, as the particular kind of grease now used for railway wheels does to Stephenson's invention of the locomotive." †

11. As there are, and always have been, multitudes of letters passing through the post office which could not be enclosed in envelopes, or be prepaid by a single low-priced stamp, any attempt to carry out a general system of prepayment of postage by means of

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\* See my letter to Mr. P. Chalmers, of 4th December 1879, published in his first pamphlet, p. 9.

† See my paper read before the London Philatelic Society in November 1881, published in the *Philatelic Record* of November 1881, p. 195.



stamps must, as a matter of course, have required the use of adhesive labels; and, therefore, even if such labels, instead of being in daily use, had until then been quite unknown, the certainty of their being required would have made their suggestion obvious.

12. Consequently, as might be expected, when Sir R. Hill, in his evidence before the Commissioners of Post Office Inquiry, on the 13th of February, 1837, proposed the adoption of Mr. Charles Knight's suggestion of stamped covers, as a most important helper in his plan of postal reform, less than five minutes' discussion of the subject with the Commissioners showed him that adhesive as well as other kinds of stamps would be necessary, and led to his proposing them then and there.

13. I need scarcely add that all statements as to his having at any time withdrawn the proposal, or deprecated the use of adhesive stamps, are absolutely untrue, and have no foundation beyond what is obtained by distortion of facts, and by false and garbled quotations from official and other documents.

14. Having now shown what the suggestion under consideration was really worth, I proceed to deal with the question as to whom the credit for having made it must be assigned.

15. Fortunately, it is not necessary to contend for, or lay down, any new rules as to the kind of evidence which alone is admissible in considering this question. In all scientific societies there is one well-known rule by which rival claims to any invention or discovery are invariably decided, namely, *by priority of publication*, and no reason has been assigned, or can be assigned, why the invention of adhesive postage stamps should be treated on any different principle. The rule, I need scarcely point out, is not one of my making; it is everywhere recognised, it is enforced by law in the case of all patents for inventions, it applies to every one impartially, and to seek to set it aside for the benefit of Mr. James Chalmers is like proposing, when a case is tried in Court, that the Judge shall set aside the established law of the country, and decide the question on considerations utterly illegal.

16. That this rule may sometimes produce an appearance of hardship in cases where the original inventor or discoverer, through dilatoriness or other cause, has seen his invention or discovery re-made, and first published by some one else, I at once admit; a well-known instance being that of Mr. Adams, the English, and M. Leverrier, the French astronomer, in their almost simultaneous discovery, some forty years ago, of the planet Neptune; but fortunately I am able to show not only that Sir Rowland Hill, as the first to have published the suggestion, is rightfully entitled to its credit, but that the rule inflicts no injustice whatever on Mr. James Chalmers.

17. As in the case of Mr. Adams' discovery, to which I have referred, so in the case of Mr. James Chalmers' adhesive stamp, no mere communicating of his idea to friends and neighbours, even if such really had taken place in 1834, would constitute the necessary



publication. The rule requires publication in a documentary form, and the justice of strictly enforcing this rule, in considering the relative priority of claims, could hardly be better demonstrated than by the present case. A published invention can always be referred to as unquestionable evidence; for even if an inventor dies and (as is alleged of Mr. James Chalmers) all his papers are destroyed, it is impossible to destroy every copy of every newspaper, magazine, or report in which the plan first appeared, and failure on the part of any claimant to produce such evidence of earlier date than that of his rival is fair proof that no such previous publication ever took place.

18. As pointed out in "The Post Office of Fifty Years Ago"\* just issued, "valuable suggestions never published are worth no more to the public than good advice never given, and any claims founded thereon are too absurd to deserve attention," but if once "hearsay" evidence, or supposed recollections of the dates at which unrecorded events, some fifty years gone by, took place, are to be admitted as proofs, credit for inventions would obviously in many cases be awarded not to those who have the best claim, but to those whose advocates were most unscrupulous in the manufacture of bogus or otherwise worthless evidence.

19. Relying, therefore, upon this well-known rule, I point to Sir Rowland Hill's evidence given before the Commissioners of Post Office Inquiry of 13th February 1837, and published in their Report of 7th July 1837, as being earlier by many months than even the earliest publication which Mr. James Chalmers himself has ever claimed.†

20. That there may be no doubt as to the nature of Sir Rowland Hill's proposal, I quote the passage, which any one will find in the Ninth Report of the Commissioners of Post Office Inquiry of 1837, p. 33, and which is reprinted in the second edition of his pamphlet on Post Office Reform, issued 22nd February 1837‡:—

"Perhaps this difficulty," Sir R. Hill says (that of employing envelopes in certain cases), "might be obviated by using a bit

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\* Published by Cassell and Co., London, Melbourne, and New York. Price one shilling.

† The earliest publication by Mr. James Chalmers *yet produced* is the paper in the South Kensington Museum, dated 8th February 1838, but in one of his letters he says (and I raise no objection to the claim) that he *first* published it in November 1837—a date, however, which is about ten months later than Sir Rowland Hill's evidence.

‡ The *second* edition of the pamphlet was the first issued to the public—the first edition, issued in January 1837, was for private circulation only. In the first edition stamps were not proposed, but, immediately afterwards, the omission was supplied by Sir R. Hill calling the attention of the Chancellor of the Exchequer to Mr. Charles Knight's valuable suggestion. It is this totally immaterial fact which alone furnishes the foundation for Mr. P. Chalmers' misleading assertion, that the use of postage stamps formed no part of the *original* plan of Sir Rowland Hill.



of paper just large enough to bear the stamp, and covered at the back with a glutinous wash, which the bringer might, by the application of a little moisture, attach to the back of the letter, so as to avoid the necessity for re-directing it."

21. This, which is, perhaps, as perfect a description of an adhesive postage stamp as could be given, is what Mr. Patrick Chalmers constantly misrepresents as a mere passing allusion in Sir R. Hill's evidence to a piece of gummed paper!

22. Mr. Patrick Chalmers asserts that, in the next paragraph, Sir Rowland Hill, in his eagerness that the use of stamped covers should be made universal, immediately withdrew this suggestion of an adhesive stamp, and recommended that even the penny should be received in cash in preference. There is not the slightest foundation for this statement, as any one referring to this evidence will at once detect. Sir R. Hill, while strongly pressing that prepayment by stamps, *as distinguished from money payments*, should be ultimately made universal, was well aware of the difficulty of getting people suddenly to change long-established custom, and of the folly of attempting to force them to do so. He therefore recommended as a temporary measure that, *in the first instance*, until the public had become accustomed to the new arrangement, they should have the *option* of prepaying either in stamps or in money, at least so far as the single-rated, or penny, letters were concerned—an option which it was found necessary to continue for many years.

23. I should have thought it scarcely necessary to point out that, even if Sir R. Hill had withdrawn his suggestion of adhesive stamps, or insisted, as has erroneously been asserted, on confining their use to exceptional cases, it would not in the slightest degree have invalidated (as Mr. P. Chalmers contends) his claim to have then originated them. It would simply have shown that he did not then value his own invention at its proper worth; but, in further proof that Sir Rowland Hill did not withdraw the suggestion, I would point out that not only was it repeated in the edition of his pamphlet published on 22nd February 1837—only nine days after this evidence—but that the Commissioners of Post Office Inquiry in the same (ninth) Report, when advising a trial of Sir R. Hill's plan in the London district, recommended the use both of stamped covers and of adhesive postage stamps. I give the passage from their Report, which will be found at its eighth page:—

"We recommend that the envelopes shall be sold to the public without any charge beyond the respective rates of 1d. and 2d., whilst labels may also be prepared of such form that they can be attached to other envelopes or covers of any size and description."

24. This Report is dated 7th July 1837, thus making, with Sir Rowland Hill's evidence of 13th February 1837, and his pamphlet of 22nd February, 1837, the third distinct publication of the plan of adhesive postage stamps before the earliest date of any such publication by Mr. James Chalmers.



25. Again, on the 7th February 1838, in his evidence before the Select Committee on Postage, 1838, of which Mr. Robert Wallace was chairman, Sir Rowland Hill again urged the adoption of the adhesive stamps. In reply to Question 129, he says . . . . .

“ And in order to avoid even the trouble of re-directing the letter, I propose that small pieces of paper of about the size of a half-penny, bearing the stamp only, shall be sold; that they shall be prepared with gum, or other glutinous wash, at the back, so that the messenger would be enabled to apply one of these to a letter, by merely wetting it, as paper seals are now applied occasionally outside a letter.”\*

26. Thus, until some publication by Mr. James Chalmers of earlier date than 13th February 1837, proposing the use of adhesive postage stamps can be produced and properly authenticated, the credit—whatever it may amount to—of having made that suggestion must, under the well-known rule which every scientific society recognises, be awarded to Sir Rowland Hill.

27. Indeed, I would point out that upon this the essential point of priority of publication—the only point to which scientific and learned societies would attach any value—the writers of the articles in the “Encyclopædia Britannica” and the “Dictionary of National Biography” (which articles Mr. P. Chalmers so constantly asserts are in his favour), unreservedly give me the verdict, admitting that I have conclusively proved that Sir Rowland Hill was the first to publish his plan—an admission which has rendered it unnecessary for me to pay much attention to their errors on other matters.

28. I now proceed to deal with the not very material question as to whether the application of the above universal rule may have inflicted upon Mr. James Chalmers the same hardship or disappointment to which any one is subjected, who, through failing to put forward his invention in time, finds it patented or published by some other independent inventor.

29. It is necessary, however, as a preliminary step to clear away a misunderstanding which, no doubt, with the view of making his father's claim seem more probable, has been extensively circulated by Mr. P. Chalmers.

30. In order to make it appear that Sir Rowland Hill had some strong though incomprehensible objection to the use of adhesive

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\* These dates and quotations absolutely disprove Mr. Patrick Chalmers' assertion that it was to Mr. James Chalmers' paper dated 8th February 1838, recently found at South Kensington Museum, that Sir R. Hill was indebted for the idea of adhesive stamps, and equally refute the nonsensical story about Sir R. Hill's plan having been adopted in 1839, without any one knowing how it was to be carried out, and James Chalmers coming to the rescue, and saving the scheme by suggesting adhesive labels!



postage stamps, Mr. P. Chalmers constantly picks out passages (without giving the context) where Sir Rowland Hill only mentions "stamped covers," or expresses a hope that the use of "stamped covers" may be made universal, or again where he speaks of the exclusive use of "stamped covers."

31. Any one who takes the trouble to read Sir R. Hill's pamphlet (republished in facsimile in "The Post Office of Fifty Years Ago"), or his evidence, and that of other witnesses, or the Parliamentary Reports and debates on the Penny Postage question, will find that the term "stamped covers" was constantly used by all parties as a short generic term to express prepayment of postage by means of *stamps* in contradistinction to payments in *money*.

32. As there was no necessity, until the present controversy arose, for drawing distinctions between stamped covers and adhesive stamps when used for prepayment of postage, such distinctions were hardly ever made, and the term "stamped covers," as the context almost invariably shows, included all kinds and varieties of stamps to be used for postal purposes, just as the better term "postage stamps" now includes covers, labels, cards, and bands.\*

33. The supposition that Sir Rowland Hill, who was striving to render the Post Office as convenient to the public as possible, should have sought to prevent people using adhesive stamps which, in his first evidence, he had himself suggested, is an idea so preposterous that one would hardly expect to encounter it outside the walls of a lunatic asylum. Even the writer of the article in the "Encyclopædia Britannica," full as it is of the most astounding errors about postage stamps and the Post-office generally,† has detected and corrected Mr. P. Chalmers' absurd misrepresentation on this matter.

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\* Even in the Act of Parliament establishing Penny Postage (2nd and 3rd Vict., cap. 52), while the 5th section enumerates stamped paper, stamped covers, and stamps to be affixed to letters, the marginal reference to that section is again simply "Stamped Covers."

† As a few specimens of these extraordinary errors in the "Encyclopædia Britannica," which any one conversant with postal matters will readily detect, I would point out that Messrs. Delarue, whose first postage stamps (the 4d. adhesive label) were not made till 1855, are credited with manufacturing postage stamps as early as 1852; while Messrs. Perkins and Bacon who, for forty years (1840-1880) made about 95-hundredths of all the postage stamps used, are not even mentioned. The Stamp Office is represented as recommending the Treasury to adopt stamped bands in a letter through Mr. Charles Knight, as though one Government office ever communicated with another through one of the outside public! It is strange how constantly writers on Postal questions make mistakes such as these, which a little trouble would have avoided. During the thirty-eight years I have been connected with the Post Office, I scarcely remember any notice of that Department, hostile or friendly, written by persons unconnected with it, which was free from error. The proprietors of the "Encyclopædia Britannica" did not avail themselves of the offer I had made to place them in com-



34. The explanation advanced by Mr. P. Chalmers, viz., that Sir R. Hill had a "positive mania" for claiming the whole scheme as his own, is equally nonsensical. No man ever was less grasping in such matters than Sir Rowland Hill. The readers of the "History of Penny Postage" or of "Sir Henry Cole's Life," will see how constantly Sir R. Hill gives him, and others, credit for every improvement they made. His own indifference in such matters is abundantly proved by the letter of Mr. Charles P. Villiers, M.P.,\* showing that when (through him) Sir R. Hill first submitted his plan privately to the Treasury, he offered to let the Government have the whole credit of the scheme if they cared to carry it into operation; while Mr. Patrick Chalmers' assertion that James Chalmers was sacrificed and his scheme purposely suppressed by Sir Rowland Hill in order that he might appropriate the credit, is completely disproved by the simple fact, already stated, that James Chalmers' paper of 8th February 1838,† upon which Mr. P. Chalmers sets such store, was published in full, with Mr. James Chalmers' name and address appended thereto, in the *Post Circular* of 5th April, 1838—a newspaper widely circulated by the Mercantile Committee of London, of which Sir Henry Cole was editor, so that no concealment, had any been desired, would have been possible.

35. In dealing with the so-called evidence, which has been put forward to support the assertion that Mr. James Chalmers proposed adhesive postage stamps in 1834, it is important to bear in mind that, in the beginning of this controversy, Mr. Patrick Chalmers advanced no such claim. He based his father's priority entirely upon the fact that he had made such suggestions in reply to the Treasury minute of 23rd August 1839, and it was only when it had been pointed out

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munication with those from whom official information could be best obtained—indeed, they appear to have made no application to the Post Office for information of any kind—and after sending them in March, 1883, a copy of my paper in the *Philatelic Record* of November, 1881, I had no further communication with them during the two-and-a-half years which elapsed before their article on postage stamps appeared. I supposed they had abandoned their intention of writing one. Meanwhile, as it afterwards turned out, they were abundantly supplied with Mr. P. Chalmers' *ex parte* and, to say the least, singularly inaccurate, statements. With the editor of the "Dictionary of National Biography" I had had no communication whatever. These facts will easily explain how these authorities were misled, and will show that the "special investigation" they are asserted by Mr. Patrick Chalmers to have made on my instigation consisted almost entirely of hearing his side of the case, and nothing more.

\* See "Life of Sir Rowland Hill," Vol. I., p. 263.

† As an instance of the *suggestio falsi* constantly to be met with in Mr. Patrick Chalmers' pamphlets, he triumphantly points to the fact that this paper of his father's was dated a year-and-a-half before the Penny Postage Act, so as to make it appear to have been earlier than Sir Rowland Hill's proposals. He leaves his readers to find out as best they may the important fact that Sir R. Hill's proposals of adhesive stamps were two-and-a-half years before the passing of the Act, and even gives a false date for Sir R. Hill's suggestion asserting that up to July, 1839, he had made no such proposal!



that Sir Rowland Hill had proposed them in 1837 that he ante-dated matters and put back his father's claim to the year 1834.

36. Passing over this significant fact, any one acquainted with the postal service of this country in 1834 will at once be struck with the obvious difficulty that as, at that time, practically no one dreamed of prepaying their letters, postage stamps would have been absolutely useless. The fact that the postman had to collect the postage on delivery was then looked upon as almost the only security that letters would ever reach their destination, while to prepay letters, unless addressed to persons of much lower social position, was then deemed as great a breach of good manners as now it would be, when writing to a gentleman, to send him a stamp to prepay his answer.\* The fact that under Sir Rowland Hill's plan of postal reform the public would, in this matter, be compelled to reverse its long-established custom, was long regarded by Sir Francis Baring and other earnest friends of the scheme as a dangerous rock ahead, upon which the whole measure might suffer shipwreck.†

37. But a far greater difficulty than mere change of custom would have stood in the way of any general plan of prepayment of postage prior to the adoption of Sir Rowland Hill's reform. The complicated system under which the varying amounts of letter postage were then determined would alone have presented insuperable obstacles.

38. Even when the Commissioners of Post Office Inquiry in July 1837, advised a trial of Sir Rowland Hill's plan in the London district, they pointed out that to secure prepayment it was essential that the distinction between the twopenny and threepenny posts should be abolished, on the ground that the public could never be got to learn the complicated boundaries between the inner and outer divisions, though when postage was collected on delivery, the charge being then raised and received by the officers of the Post Office, the difficulty was easily overcome.

39. This difficulty, so formidable to the public when only one boundary would have to be regarded, shows how utterly hopeless it would have been to attempt to establish prepayment as regards letters generally, where even the "single" rates of inland postage (ranging from 4d. to 1s. 8½d.) were so various, and where the question was still further complicated by the fact that the letters became liable to multiple rates regulated up to a certain point by the number of enclosures, and afterwards by the total weight of the missive, while even the charge for distance between the same

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\* In the evidence given before the Select Committee on Postage it was shown that prior to 1840 Members of Parliament were constantly asked to frank letters addressed to scientific people and others, from whom the writers desired information, but whom they hardly liked to subject to the expense of paying the postage, and did not wish to offend by sending the letters prepaid.

† See "The Post Office of Fifty Years Ago," p. 19.



places was liable to constant variation, as the Post Office in those days regulated its charge not by the real distance between any two post towns, but by the route, however circuitous, which the Department chose to adopt when carrying the particular mail. Thus, for instance, letters from Loughton to Epping (places only two or three miles apart) were carried into London and out again, and charged a postage of sevenpence, that being the rate under the old system for letters between post towns ranging from thirty to fifty miles apart.

40. It is noteworthy that in the earliest days of the London local "Penny Post" established by Dockwra in the 17th century, which was then confined to London, Southwark, and Westminster, prepayment of postage was compulsory, but afterwards, when the post was extended into outlying suburbs at a higher rate of postage, prepayment, so convenient to the Department, had to be abandoned.

41. Mr. Charles Knight's abortive proposal in 1834 to employ stamped wrappers for newspapers, if the compulsory Stamp Duty were abolished, was, at all events, a practicable suggestion, because the proposed postal charge on newspapers was to have been, like the Newspaper Duty Stamp, a uniform rate—newspapers having then, as now, been always carried at exceptional rates which no one ever dreamed of applying to letters—but any proposal that postage stamps should be used for letters or other articles sent through the post, before Sir Rowland Hill had discovered and demonstrated the justice of a uniform rate of postage, and had thereby created the opportunity for their employment, would have been simply an idle and useless suggestion.

42. These considerations will amply explain why the attempts made in Paris in 1653 and in Sardinia in 1819 to use stamps for prepayment of postage were failures, and had so soon to be abandoned. It was Sir R. Hill's plan that first breathed life into the invention, which, up to that time, had been still-born. With the old varying rates of postage, prepayment was practically impossible.

43. Mr. P. Chalmers has endeavoured to meet this fatal objection to his claim—pointed out by me more than six years ago—by asserting that uniform penny postage had been previously suggested—apparently as a sort of happy thought—by a Mr. Samuel Roberts. It is sufficient to point out that not the slightest proof of any such suggestion by Mr. Samuel Roberts has ever been forthcoming. Neither his supposed scheme, nor even his name, is anywhere mentioned in any of the numerous Parliamentary and other Reports upon postal questions.

44. At the Post Office itself, where the official registers are a marvel of completeness, no record or trace of any such plan is to be found, and nothing whatever is known there of any suggestions by Mr. Samuel Roberts beyond that gentleman's own assertions made many years *after* penny postage had been an admitted success. His, for aught I know, may have been a perfectly honest delusion; many similar claimants (more or less insane) having from time to time come forward with pretensions equally unreal, their halluci-



nations being about on a par with George IV.'s assertion that he had commanded the Guards at the Battle of Waterloo, or with Mr. George Cruickshank's more recent belief, when he was an old man, that he, and not Charles Dickens, was the real author of *Oliver Twist*.

45. It is obviously for those who pretend that Mr. Samuel Roberts ever proposed such a plan to furnish satisfactory evidence of their assertions, rather than to expect *disproof* of what has never been proved; and, though to establish a negative is proverbially almost impossible, yet in this instance ample evidence exists that Mr. Roberts never brought forward any such suggestion.

46. Mr. Patrick Chalmers asserts that Mr. S. Roberts was one of that band of early postal reformers of which, as is well known, Mr. Robert Wallace, M.P., was the recognised leader and Parliamentary champion. If Mr. Roberts ever brought forward such a scheme, it could not have failed, therefore, to have come to the knowledge of Mr. Wallace. The cordiality with which Mr. Wallace in 1837—throwing aside all his own plans—at once welcomed Sir Rowland Hill's plan of Uniform Penny Postage the moment the latter sent him a copy of his pamphlet\*, is abundant proof that had any similar scheme been previously announced by Mr. S. Roberts,† or anyone else, it would equally have received Mr. Wallace's earnest and unselfish support.

47. Now, Mr. Wallace's speech in the House of Commons, made in July 1836, shows conclusively that up to that date he had no idea of uniformity of postage, as the following passage will prove:

“At the same time the rates of postage ought to be reduced. It would be proper not to charge more than 3d. for any letter sent a distance of fifty miles; for 100 miles 4d.; 200 miles 6d.; and the highest rate of postage ought not to be more than 8d. or 9d. at most.”‡

48. Even so late as 17th February 1837—only five days before the publication of Sir Rowland Hill's celebrated pamphlet—Mr. Wallace, in his evidence before the Commissioners of Post Office Inquiry (see ninth Report), urged that the rates of postage should be regulated by *distance*—meaning thereby the *real* distance between any post towns—and not by the circuitous routes which the Post Office adopted for its own convenience, thus again showing that even then he had not a word to say with reference to that principle of uniformity of postage which so soon after he eagerly welcomed.

49. But Mr. Wallace—the highest authority on such a point—has fortunately left on record more direct and unquestionable

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\* See “Life of Sir Rowland Hill,” Vol. I., p. 267.

† Since the above was written, my attention has been called to the fact that in his published works on the Penny Postage question Mr. S. Roberts, in August 1846, himself speaks of Mr. Rowland Hill as the author of that system (*awdur y drefn*).

‡ See “Hansard,” Vol. XXXV., third series, p. 422, or “Life of Sir R. Hill,” Vol. II., p. 494.



testimony, as to who was the originator of the plan of Uniform Penny Postage, for in 1841, in his speech at Aberdeen, when the facts were, of course, fresh in his memory, he spoke as follows :

“ And here let me say once for all that to Mr. Hill alone is the country indebted for that scheme, for he is the real inventor, and its only discoverer.”\*

50. Again, there is on this point, under Mr. James Chalmers' own hand, evidence which, in reference to the present controversy, is most important. In his letter to Sir Rowland Hill of 1st October 1839, submitting his plan of adhesive “slips,” in reply to the Treasury invitation of 23rd August of that year, Mr. J. Chalmers writes :

“ I beg to congratulate you on the successful result of your labours, and on the appointment which you have received to superintend the execution of your admirable plan, convinced as I am that it cannot be in better hands, nor in those of one having a higher claim to it.”†

51. Unless Mr. Patrick Chalmers is prepared to plead that his father was a dishonest sycophant, flattering those in high places, in hopes of getting the pecuniary reward offered by the Treasury, this paragraph shows that he recognised Sir Rowland Hill as the originator of the plan of Postal Reform then about to be adopted—of which plan uniformity and prepayment of postage were the most essential features—and consequently that he, James Chalmers, could have had no knowledge of any similar pre-existing plan.

52. As a power of foreseeing discoveries in 1834, which were then three years off has not yet been claimed for Mr. James Chalmers, it is clear that he must have known in 1834—if he ever thought about the matter—that to obtain prepayment of postage was a practical impossibility. Under Sir Rowland Hill's reform, prepayment was essential in order to obtain that simplicity, which alone would render profitable, or even practicable, the great reduction in postage that he advocated—which reduction reconciled the public to the necessary change of habit—but under the old postal arrangements, *as paid letters were then charged the same postage as unpaid*, no advantage whatever would have been obtained by the public in prepaying their letters, and any suggestion, therefore, in 1834 to use adhesive postage stamps would not have been worth the paper upon which it was written. Besides being utterly impracticable, the scheme would have been wholly unacceptable to the public.

53. Fortunately, in this matter one is not driven to rely on mere probabilities, Mr. James Chalmers' letters (which I have placed in the hands of Mr. Philbrick, Q.C., the President of the London

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\* See *Aberdeen Herald* of 2nd October 1841, or “Life of Sir Rowland Hill,” Vol I., p. 446.

† See *Philatelic Record* for November 1881, page 198.



Philatelic Society) prove beyond question that it was not till long after the publication of Sir Rowland Hill's pamphlet of 22 February 1837, that he, James Chalmers, put forward his suggestions.

54. The facts of the case were so clearly and accurately stated in a letter published on 5th October 1883, in a short-lived paper called the *Postal, Telegraphic, and Telephonic Gazette*, that I cannot do better than quote therefrom.

“ When did Mr. James Chalmers first publish his suggestion? This question is fortunately decided, beyond the possibility of doubt, by Mr. James Chalmers' own letters, which are still in existence.

“ Where James Chalmers comes upon the scene will perhaps be best understood by your readers when I mention that in August 1839—some two-and-a-half years after Mr. Hill's evidence had been given, and when the question of penny postage had been successfully fought through Select Committees and Parliament—the Treasury (which had then decided to adopt his plan, including ‘ stamped covers, stamped paper, and stamps to be used separately:’ see Treasury Minutes) advertised for suggestions and designs from the public, and, in reply to this invitation, some forty-nine individuals, including Mr. James Chalmers, sent in proposals for adhesive labels, or ‘ slips,’ as Mr. James Chalmers preferred to call them.

“ How crude and impracticable his suggestions were may be gathered from the fact that, except where envelopes were to be used, he advised the abandonment of gum (on account of the supposed difficulty of gumming large sheets of paper) and proposed that the stamps should be attached to letters by wafers or sealing-wax!\*

“ Mr. James Chalmers, unaware of Mr. Rowland Hill's previous suggestions above quoted, and anxious, in view of the premium offered by the Treasury, to prove that he was the first to suggest adhesive stamps, states, in his letter to Mr. Rowland Hill of October 1, 1839: ‘ If slips are to be used, I flatter myself that I have a claim to priority in the suggestion, it being now nearly two years since I first made it public and submitted it in a communication to Mr. Wallace, M.P.’

“ ‘ Nearly two years,’ from October 1, 1839, carries one back to about the end of 1837; and in other documents which Mr. James Chalmers forwarded, he gives December, 1837, as the date of his communication to Mr. Wallace, and says that November 1837, was the date at which he *first* published his plan. He himself puts the word ‘ first’ in italics.

“ Mr. James Chalmers' letters, therefore, prove beyond question that the date at which he ‘ first made his plan public’

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\* [Mr. James Chalmers printed his proposals and circulated them, with specimens. Copies are still extant, and show that he deliberately advised the non-use of the adhesive matter at the backs of the stamps in almost all cases, and advocated their attachment to the letter by inserting them in the fold at the back, securing them by the seal, thus leaving the larger part of the stamp flying loose!—a scheme obviously quite unworkable.—P. H. 19/3/88.]



was at least eight or nine months after Mr. Rowland Hill, in his evidence and pamphlets, had published a similar but far more workable suggestion.

"Mr. Chalmers' plans were not adopted, other and better designs having been sent in; but he appears to have thought himself aggrieved, and Mr. Rowland Hill kindly sent him a copy of the Ninth Report, containing the evidence above referred to, in order that he might see he was mistaken in supposing he had been 'first in the field.' Mr. Chalmers thereupon, in a very creditable letter, dated May 18, 1840, which your readers will find published in the *Philatelic Record* of November 1881, candidly and fully withdrew his claim to priority, and expressed his regret that he had, in ignorance, put it forward.\*

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\* [For the convenience of the Reader, I reprint that portion of my paper of November 1881, to which reference is here made:

"Even yet I have not produced the strongest piece of evidence which disproves Mr. Patrick Chalmers' statements; for this consists of a letter, which I now submit to the meeting, from Mr. James Chalmers himself, who, on the 18th of January 1840, had been referred by Sir Rowland Hill to the evidence just quoted, and who, on the 18th of May 1840, wrote to Sir R. Hill, fully and candidly withdrawing his claim. The renunciation is so complete, and the letter written in such perfect good taste, that I venture to give a rather long extract from it:

" 'Dundee, 18th May 1840.

" 'ROWLAND HILL, Esq.

" 'Sir,—I received your favour of the 18th January last, relative to my claim for the "postage adhesive stamp," for which I thank you, as it certainly would have been far from satisfactory to me to have received only the Treasury Circular refusing my claim without any explanation.

" 'My reason for not replying sooner proceeded from a wish to see the stamps in operation, which, although not general, they now are. I therefore conceive it only an act of justice to myself to state to you what induced me to become a competitor; for in that capacity I never would have appeared if I had known that any one, particularly you, had suggested anything like the same scheme. But having given publicity to my plan nearly two years before the Treasury Minute of August last appeared inviting competition, and having in my possession Mr. Wallace, M.P.'s, letter of 9th December 1837, acknowledging receipt of my plan, wherein he says, "*These* and several others I have received will be duly submitted to the Committee on Postage;" also your letter of 3rd March 1838, a copy of which I prefix; and one from Mr. Chalmers, M.P., October 7, 1839, in which he says several plans had been submitted to the House of Commons' Committee, "including yours"—from all these I was naturally induced to believe that I was *first* in the field, and consequently became a competitor. Your letter, however, of the 18th January undeceived me on that point, although I cannot help saying that my scheme has rather a closer alliance to the one adopted than can be inferred from the copy of your evidence sent to me.

" 'I have, however, only to regret that, through my ignorance, I was led to put others and myself to trouble in the matter, besides some unavoidable expense, while the *only* satisfaction I have had in this, as well as in former suggestions (all



“Against this clear and positive evidence, under Mr. James Chalmers’ own hand, given, moreover, when the facts were fresh in his recollection, and when he had the strongest possible inducement to assign to his suggestions the earliest date that he could consistently with the truth—evidence which, I need scarcely point out, is absolutely destructive of Mr. James Chalmers’ claim—his son, Mr. Patrick Chalmers, sets some letters of very recent date (1882), which he says he has received from three or four old people, who say they recollect assisting Mr. James Chalmers in setting up types and gumming paper for adhesive labels, *some forty or fifty years ago*, and that they believe the date to have been 1834!—a date, I may point out, when, owing to the complicated and varying rates of postage then in force, nobody dreamed of prepaying their letters, and when postage stamps would, consequently, have been about as useful to the British public as flannel jackets to little niggers.

“Would even five hundred such ‘recollections,’ forty or fifty years after the time, not as to *what* James Chalmers did, but as to *when* he did it, outweigh the clear and positive statements contained in his own letters?”

“Can anyone suppose that this claim, if just, would have been permitted to slumber for forty years, or reconcile with one’s ordinary notions of sanity the manner in which this claim has been urged and persisted in, after its worthlessness has been repeatedly exposed? The hint now given of a hope that money may be got by it from the Government may, perhaps, to cynical minds suggest an explanation of all that has taken place; but, on the other hand, the very fact that anyone should for a moment believe the Treasury would entertain a demand so preposterous is rather additional evidence that, in some quarter or other, there must be an extraordinary hallucination.

“ST. MARTIN’S-LE-GRAND.”

To this letter the Editor appended the following note :

“The above is written by a gentleman who, holding a high official position in the Post Office, enjoys unusual facilities for knowing the facts concerning which he writes. We should be thankful if, after this, we might hear no more of a claim which, for the last three years, has been urged, in and out of season, *usque ad nauseam*.”

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original to me), is that these have been adopted, and have, and are likely to prove beneficial to the public.’

“Whether the stamps suggested by Mr. James Chalmers, and which I now produce, do bear ‘a closer alliance to the one adopted’ than the description given by Sir Rowland Hill in his evidence, is a matter of opinion, and one on which I should hardly be prepared to agree with him; but, as his renunciation (after having seen the stamps which were issued) is complete, I should not, even if he were now alive, be at all inclined to grudge so honest and earnest a worker in the cause of postal reform the little crumb of comfort which he then took to himself.”—*See Philatelic Record*, November 1881, p. 199.

I invite comparison between the above letter showing what James Chalmers *really did* say, and the wholly fictitious letter which Mr. P. Chalmers publishes, pretending to give what his father said “in effect.”—P. H., 15/5/88.]



55. Before criticising the value of these marvellous recollections by old people of Dundee of the precise dates of events nearly fifty years gone by, it is important to notice the dates of their letters. These are published in one of Mr. P. Chalmers' numerous pamphlets (printed early in 1883), and are dated April and May 1882. Now in November 1881, the London Philatelic Society had before them my paper, published in the *Philatelic Record* of that month, a copy of which they had sent to Mr. Chalmers. They received from him in return copies of his published documents, and carefully read all his statements in the case. They repeatedly invited him to send the additional evidence he hinted was in his possession, and waited month after month till October 1882, for any additional proofs he might like to furnish in support of his claims, before they decided on the serious charges I had brought against him, nor did they proceed to judgment without ample notice to both parties to bring all evidence on which they relied.\* Up to this time, Mr. Patrick Chalmers had been urging the Commissioners of Sewers, the Rowland Hill Memorial Committee, and other authorities, little likely to possess the requisite knowledge of the facts, to examine into his claim, yet now, when the best possible opportunity was afforded him, he seemed to find a real investigation hardly to his taste; he advisedly sent in nothing more in the way of proof, and left the society to decide the question on the materials—certainly not wanting in quantity—which he had already supplied. Finally, after waiting altogether for more than ten months, the Society pronounced against him on every point.† Now, these letters from the old people of Dundee, which form the sole evidence on which is based the claim that James Chalmers invented adhesive postage stamps in 1834, must have been in Mr. Patrick Chalmers' possession, as their dates prove, for nearly six months before the London Philatelic Society pronounced judgment, so that he had ample opportunity, if he felt they would bear investigation, of submitting them to this the most competent tribunal in the country, which was then actually investigating his claim. Instead of so doing, he never even revealed their existence, or hinted that the writers could give evidence on the subject, till after the Society had pronounced its decision.

56. What Mr. Patrick Chalmers' motive was in pursuing this course, it is not necessary here to define, but had he wished people to believe that his object was to delay indefinitely a decision which he knew must be adverse to his claim, or to prepare beforehand a pretence for discrediting the judgment of the London Philatelic

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\* It is important to contrast the care taken by the London Philatelic Society before coming to any decision to hear both sides, with the proceedings of the Philatelic Societies of other countries, which Mr. P. Chalmers says have decided in his favour, not one of these societies having asked Sir Rowland Hill's representatives for any information on the matter, or even let them know that the question was under consideration, while the value of Mr. P. Chalmers' *ex parte* statements with which they had been supplied may be readily gauged by the instances of his *suppressio veri* and *suggestio falsi* to which, in this Memorandum, I again call attention.

† See *Philatelic Record* for November 1882.



Society, by asserting, as he afterwards did, that he had not been fully heard,\* he could hardly have adopted a course more calculated to lay himself open to such a charge.

57. That the real facts of this proceeding may be properly understood, I reprint the following letter from the Secretary of the London Philatelic Society, which appeared in the *Dundee Advertiser*, of 25th April, 1883, exposing them :

“ THE ADHESIVE STAMP.

“ To the Editor of the *Dundee Advertiser*.

“ Sir,—My attention has been called to a letter from Mr. Patrick Chalmers in your issue of the 19th inst. I shall not venture to criticise the resolution which the Dundee Town Council, without calling for any evidence from the other side, saw fit to pass in favour of the claim advanced by Mr. P. Chalmers on behalf of his father, but I ask your permission to reply to Mr. Chalmers' statement to the effect that, 'as respects the decision of that body before which Mr. Pearson Hill was pleased to bring his case, it is enough to say that, so far from the matter having been "fully investigated," this decision was issued at least two months before my "reply" was drawn up—its value may thus be appreciated.'

“ ‘That body,' elsewhere more respectfully referred to by Mr. Chalmers whilst the matter in question was still under consideration as 'a scientific society,' wrote to Mr. Chalmers on the 1st December 1881, 21st January 1882, 22nd April 1882, 17th June 1882, and 9th October 1882, and in each of these letters called on Mr. Chalmers for such further evidence in support of his allegations as he might be in a position to furnish. In the last letter we pointed out that eleven months having elapsed since we first wrote him on the subject, we should now proceed to examine the evidence before us and give our verdict.

“ That our investigation was full no one except, of course, Mr. Chalmers, will venture to question after reading our report. But I regret to say that throughout the discussion Mr. Chalmers has continually taken refuge in what I will not qualify more harshly than the *suppressio veri*.

“ As regards his denial that he suppressed portions of the correspondence which passed between him and Mr. Pearson Hill, I can only say that I have seen his letter to Mr. Hill of the 10th December 1879, and a copy of that gentleman's reply, dated the 13th idem, and that I am thus in a position to assert that Mr. Chalmers did not give much more than half of their contents, when he pretended to reprint them in his pamphlets.—I am, &c.,

“ M. BURNETT,

“ Secretary to the Philatelic Society, London.

“ 13, Gray's Inn-square, London, 23rd April 1883.”

58. Worthless as impossible recollections like those of the old people of Dundee would be under any circumstances, their character

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\* See Mr. P. Chalmers' letter in the *Dundee Advertiser* of 19th April 1883.



in this instance is thoroughly exposed by the very assertions of one of the witnesses, Mr. Whitelaw, recently published in the *American Philatelic Journal* of September 1887. In seeking to support the Chalmers' claim he completely breaks it down.

59. He says that "when it had been settled that the Penny Postage system was to be adopted, James Chalmers set to work to draw up a plan of adhesive stamps, which he did, and showed it to a number of his neighbour merchants about the High Street of Dundee." Now, in 1834, the year in which he asserts this took place, the Penny Postage system had not even been heard of, and its adoption was not settled till 1839. Probably Mr. Whitelaw meant to say "when the Penny Postage system had been *proposed*," but that was not till February 1837; or possibly he may have had lingering in his memory the recommendation of the ninth Report (already quoted) that the system should be adopted, experimentally, in the London District; but the date of that report is no earlier than July 1837. The very circumstance, therefore, mentioned by Mr. Whitelaw as fixing the date shows conclusively that the date he gives (1834) cannot possibly be correct, but, on the other hand, it entirely fits in with the date which Mr. James Chalmers himself gives as to when he first made his plan public, viz., in the latter end of 1837.

60. But this breakdown of Mr. Whitelaw's evidence by the simplest test shows the impossibility of trusting to mere memory of any witness for the date of an event so trivial, and so long gone by, as his assisting Mr. J. Chalmers fifty years before to set up types and print and gum labels. Mr. James Chalmers was a printer by trade, and doubtless printed and gummed hundreds of labels for jam pots, pickles, marmalade, and fifty other purposes.

61. Mr. Patrick Chalmers has sought to neutralise his father's withdrawal of all claim to priority, after reading Sir Rowland Hill's evidence of 13th February 1837, by the wholly untrue assertion that Sir Rowland Hill, in his letter of 18th January 1840, to Mr. James Chalmers, obscured and misrepresented the facts, and so obtained from him a withdrawal of his claim.

62. Mr. Patrick Chalmers admits elsewhere that he does not even know what that letter contains, as I have refused, ever since he published a mutilated version of our correspondence, to trust him with any further documents, and scarcely any one else, I think, would venture to make such a charge for which not even a shadow of evidence is produced; but it can hardly be necessary for me to point out:

Firstly, That Mr. James Chalmers' statement as to the latter part of 1837 having been the date at which he first made his plan public, *was volunteered by him in his letter of 1st October 1839*, when he could not possibly have been influenced by anything contained in a letter which was not even written till the following January; and

Secondly, That, even when his priority was challenged, he still, in his letter of 18th May 1840, gives as his earliest date November



1837, and no obscuring of facts by Sir Rowland Hill, even if such had taken place, could possibly cause Mr. James Chalmers to give the wrong dates as to his *own* suggestions.

63. These unfounded assertions of Mr. Patrick Chalmers, however, sink almost into insignificance compared with the extraordinary manœuvre by which he endeavoured to weaken the effect of the exposure of his pretensions made by the letter in the *Postal, Telegraphic, and Telephonic Gazette* already quoted. His proceedings in this matter were so typical of those he has adopted throughout this controversy that it is necessary to explain them, in order to show what value should be attached to any statements coming through his hands, or from old people like his Dundee correspondents, who, having been in communication with him, as their letters show, doubtless had had their memory "assisted" before their published letters were written.

64. Beyond a vague denial of their accuracy, Mr. Patrick Chalmers never attempted any refutation of the authoritative statements contained in the letter of 5th October, 1883. He waited some four or five months, and then, without making the slightest allusion to that letter, or to any of the hundreds of other statements that had ever appeared in the same newspaper, he wrote, in March 1884, to the Secretary of the Post Office, London, merely asking the apparently simple question whether the *Postal, Telegraphic and Telephonic Gazette* was an official newspaper expressing the opinions of the Post Office. Now, as there is but one official newspaper in this country, viz., *The London Gazette*, the answer Mr. P. Chalmers received was, as of course he knew it would be, in the negative; and it is this answer to a question perfectly irrelevant, which he constantly advertises as an official letter from Her Majesty's Post Office *repudiating the opinions* of his opponents!

65. That the "official letter from Her Majesty's Post Office" cannot possibly bear the interpretation which Mr. P. Chalmers puts upon it, will be seen from the following letter, with which I was favoured by Sir Arthur Blackwood, K.C.B., the Secretary of the Post Office, when I called his attention to Mr. Patrick Chalmers' proceedings:

" General Post Office,  
" 7th July 1887.

" Dear Sir,

" My letter to Mr. P. Chalmers of 24th March 1884, was merely a reply in the negative to his question if the *Postal Telegraphic and Telephonic Gazette* was an official journal, in the sense that the Post Office was responsible for anything therein contained.

" The accuracy or inaccuracy of any particular statement was not even raised in Mr. Chalmers' letter, and certainly was not referred to in mine.

" Faithfully yours,

" S. ARTHUR BLACKWOOD.

Pearson Hill, Esq."



66. This is by no means the only instance in which, during this contention, Mr. Patrick Chalmers has availed himself of a small substratum of truth upon which to erect a mass of statements that are, to say the least, wholly inconsistent with the facts.

67. Amongst the many such statements circulated by Mr. Patrick Chalmers is one so easy of disproof that it may be doubted whether any really sane person would ever have ventured upon it. He constantly advertises, and has issued a pamphlet announcing the "Submission of the Sir Rowland Hill Committee," and asserts that the Mansion House Memorial Committee have admitted the truth of his contention that Sir R. Hill was not the originator of the Uniform Penny Postage System, and in consequence have altered the inscription on the City statue erected to Sir Rowland Hill's memory.

68. That there is not the slightest excuse or justification for Mr. Patrick Chalmers' assertion, the following letter from Mr. Alderman Whitehead, the Honorary Secretary of that Committee, will show. Indeed, this assertion has been so often contradicted that it is difficult to suppose Mr. P. Chalmers can be ignorant of its untruth.

" Highfield House,

" Catford Bridge, Kent, S.E.

" 29th October 1887.

" Dear Sir,

" In answer to your letter of 24th instant, there is not the slightest excuse for the assertion of Mr. Patrick Chalmers that the Memorial Committee admitted that Sir Rowland Hill was not the originator of the Penny Postage scheme, or that they changed the inscription for the City statue in consequence of his or any other representations.

" No doubt of any kind was at any time expressed by a single member of the committee as to Sir Rowland Hill's right to be considered the originator and founder of the system. The only difference of opinion amongst us was as to what would be the most suitable and impressive inscription for the statue. One proposal (my own) was that it should run, 'He gave us Penny Postage'; another, 'He founded Penny Postage'; a third, 'Founder of Uniform Penny Postage.' Eventually, and *after* Mr. Patrick Chalmers' contention had been *fully considered*, we decided that it should be the last of these three.

" The words on the memorial in Westminster Abbey, which describe him as the 'Originator of the Penny Postage System' were written by the late Dean Stanley, and were submitted to and unanimously approved by the Committee.

" Thus you will see that we were agreed that both 'founder' and 'originator' correctly described Sir Rowland Hill's position in connection with this great public boon.

" I think I ought to add that Mr. Chalmers afterwards sent to each member of the Committee numerous letters and pamphlets on the subject, but neither the Committee nor, so far as



I know, any individual member of the Committee, thought that his communications called for reply."

" I am,

" Dear Sir,

" Yours faithfully,

" JAMES WHITEHEAD.

" Pearson Hill, Esq."

69. These instances of the singular inaccuracy, to use the mildest term, of Mr. Patrick Chalmers' statements, will, I think, be sufficient to prove either that he is on this question out of his mind, or that he recklessly puts forward any statement he fancies may serve his purpose—leaving it to chance as to whether it be true or false.\*

70. In the very commencement of this controversy, in his pamphlet issued in December, 1880, Mr. Patrick Chalmers began by publishing a false and garbled version of the correspondence which had passed between us—suppressing whole paragraphs, which were most important, without even showing that he was keeping anything back.† Over and over again he has coolly denied this charge, and has had it proved against him by a comparison of the real letters with his mutilated version. From his conduct in this matter it will be readily understood why I have long ago refused to have any further communication with Mr. Patrick Chalmers, and why—having submitted Mr. James Chalmers' letters and other documents on this question to Mr. Philbrick, Q.C., the President of the London Philatelic Society, as the most competent and impartial judge of their bearing on the case—I have refused to trust even copies thereof, or any other information, to one who, in a morbid craze for notoriety, or in pursuit of objects even less commendable, appears to have set at nought every consideration of truth and honour.

71. If additional evidence were wanted to prove that upon this question Mr. Patrick Chalmers can hardly be in his right mind, it would surely be furnished by the paragraphs constantly communicated to the public press, which show how the claim advanced on behalf of Mr. James Chalmers is being continually augmented. From the simple claim set up in the first instance of his having merely suggested the use of adhesive labels, it is now asserted that he anticipated Archer, who in 1847 suggested the perforation of postage stamps; and, in one paragraph which has appeared in a London newspaper since this memorandum was written, it is now even claimed that he was the real originator of the Uniform Penny Postage System! Not only is Sir Rowland Hill to be declared a usurper, but even poor Mr. Samuel Roberts (now dead), who has

\* In one of his latest pamphlets he hazards another deliberate statement which is wholly untrue. He states that Sir Rowland Hill, in his letter to Mr. James Chalmers of 3 March 1838, had written "to the effect of not being in favour of an adhesive stamp." There is not, in that letter or any other, anything that can in the slightest degree bear that interpretation.

† See Appendix, p. 32.



hitherto been so useful as the true inventor, is thrown over, and Mr. James Chalmers put up in his place! Probably before the jubilee of Penny Postage arrives some old people in Dundee or Bedlam will be discovered who can testify that Mr. James Chalmers also designed the General Post Office in St. Martin's-le-Grand, and that the Postal Telegraphs, Telephones, and the Parcel Post were all invented by Mr. James Chalmers in 1834, and communicated by him to his wondering friends and neighbours.

72. Would any sane person accept seriously what Mr. P. Chalmers constantly advances as "strong confirmatory evidence," or "valuable recognitions" of his claims? Can anything, for instance, be more ridiculous than his putting forward as an important "official recognition" of his pretensions, the fact that some of the clerks in the Glasgow Post Office believe in his assertions, when he must know that at St. Martin's-le-Grand—where alone the official records are available for examination—his claims are scouted as too preposterous to be for a moment entertained? Or again, when some newspaper editor has good-naturedly inserted one of Mr. Patrick Chalmers' paragraphs, would anyone else dream of thereupon gravely adding the name of that newspaper to the list of those which he asserts have recognized the truth of his contention?

73. Unless his object be to give a fictitious appearance of weight to his assertions, what can be more childish than his calling himself an "historian," simply on the ground that since he commenced the publication of his singularly *unhistorical* statements about postage stamps (apparently his sole qualification for membership), he has joined and paid his subscriptions to the Royal Historical Society? A man might as well be called an astronomer because he joins the Royal Astronomical Society, or a goose because he subscribes to a Goose Club.

74. Even if Mr. Patrick Chalmers' claim that his father invented adhesive postage stamps in 1834 were fully conceded, it would only amount to this, that he made an invention at a time when it was utterly useless, as neither the Post Office or the public would or could have employed it, and that he was so incapable of giving effect to this invention that it lay dormant for several years until the same idea, independently acquired, was carried to a successful issue by Sir Rowland Hill as a minor detail in his great measure of Postal Reform. Would any ordinarily intelligent person care to waste seven minutes, to say nothing of seven years, in urging a claim so utterly insignificant? Surely if the Commissioners in Lunacy are in want of a promising case they might find one at Wimbledon admirably adapted to their hands.



## SUMMARY.

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For the convenience of the Reader I now summarise the principal points of the foregoing Memorandum.

- As stamps had been employed, though only temporarily, in Paris nearly 200 years before either Sir Rowland Hill or James Chalmers paid any attention to the question of their use, and as adhesive stamps for non-postal purposes had been in common use in this country ever since the year 1802, no one could claim, either in 1834 or 1837, to have then first suggested either the use of stamps for prepayment of postage, or the making of stamps which should be adhesive.
- The only point, therefore, which could be claimed in this matter either for Sir Rowland Hill, or for Mr. James Chalmers (if it be worth claiming), is: Who, when the question again arose of using stamps for prepayment of postage, was the first afterwards to suggest that a well-known form of stamp, the adhesive label, should also be available for that purpose.
- This suggestion, though originating with Sir Rowland Hill, was, I have always contended, one of very minor detail, certain to occur to scores of people the moment his plan of uniform postage overcame the difficulties which had hitherto rendered the use of any postage stamps impossible, and when submitting his plan to the Commissioners of Post Office Inquiry on 13th February, 1837, Mr. (afterwards Sir) Rowland Hill, foreseeing their necessity, at once proposed them, while all statements as to his ever having withdrawn this suggestion are untrue.
- The rule by which all scientific societies, as well as the laws of every civilised country, determine rival claims to inventions is invariably by priority of publication. Ample reasons exist, as I show, for the strict observance of this rule—in this case most especially.
- Relying on this rule, I point to Sir Rowland Hill's evidence of 13th February, 1837 (which I quote), as the earliest known publication of such a plan—and to at least two other publications of his suggestion prior to the earliest date which James Chalmers ever claimed—and upon this, the only essential point, the writers of the articles in the "Encyclopædia Britannica" and the "Dictionary of National Biography" unreservedly decide in favour of Sir Rowland Hill, admitting that I conclusively prove that he was the first to publish his suggestion.
- As regards the minor question, as to whether James Chalmers may have invented, though he did not publish, his scheme before Sir Rowland Hill did so, I first show the absurdity of Mr. P.



Chalmers' assertions, that Sir Rowland Hill objected to the use of adhesive stamps, or desired to make the use of "stamped covers" universal and that he afterwards suppressed James Chalmers' scheme, as he had a "mania" for claiming the whole credit to himself. Paragraphs 30 to 34.

I show that, as James Chalmers' paper of 8th February, 1838, was published in the *Post Circular* newspaper of 5th April, 1838, no concealment was attempted or would have been possible; and, further, that this claim of Mr. Patrick Chalmers that his father had proposed adhesive stamps in 1834 was only put forward by him after his previous claim, fixing the date in 1839 had been shown to be worthless. Paragraph 34.  
Paragraph 35.

Further, I show that prior to Sir Rowland Hill's proposals in 1837 prepayment of postage would have been impossible, and any suggestion for stamps useless. Mr. P. Chalmers' assertion that Mr. Samuel Roberts first proposed penny postage (made to get over this fatal objection to his claim) I show to be untrue, and I prove that even Mr. Robert Wallace, M.P., the recognised leader and Parliamentary champion of Postal Reform, had no knowledge of any such suggestion prior to the issue of Sir Rowland Hill's pamphlet, while Mr. Wallace, the highest possible authority on such a question, has unreservedly declared that to Sir Rowland Hill alone the country was indebted for the plan of Uniform Penny Postage, that "he was the real inventor, and the only discoverer, of the plan." Paragraph 36.  
Paragraph 43.  
Paragraph 46.  
Paragraph 49.

Further, that James Chalmers' own admission of this fact proves that he could have had no previous knowledge of any such scheme, and therefore must have known in 1834 that the public could not have used adhesive or other postage stamps, even if they would, and would not have used them even if they could; and that his own letters still in existence prove that the latter end of 1837, and not 1834, was the real date at which he first made his plan public, a date much later than Sir Rowland Hill's similar suggestions. I show that the whole question was thoroughly investigated by the London Philatelic Society, which decided against Mr. Patrick Chalmers on every point, and I prove the worthlessness of the evidence (?) from old people who pretend to be able to recollect the exact date of events some fifty years gone by, and the untruthfulness of the assertions whereby Mr. P. Chalmers seeks to neutralise his father's withdrawal of his claim. I expose the manœuvre which Mr. Patrick Chalmers adopted to get what he misrepresents as an official letter from Her Majesty's Post Office repudiating the opinions of his opponents; while I also show that there is no truth in his assertion that the Rowland Hill Memorial Committee have recognised the justice of his contention, and in consequence altered the inscription on the City statue. I explain why I have refused to have any communication with Mr. P. Chalmers, or to trust him with copies of any documents, and I show good reasons for believing that upon this question Mr. Patrick Chalmers is hardly to be held accountable for anything he says or does. Paragraph 50.  
Paragraph 52.  
Paragraph 53.  
Paragraph 55.  
Paragraph 58.  
Paragraph 61.  
Paragraph 63.  
Paragraph 67.  
Paragraph 70.  
Paragraph 71.

PEARSON HILL.

19th March, 1888.

APPENDIX.



# APPENDIX.

The following speaks for itself :

(From the *ATHENÆUM*, May 14th, 1881.)

“SIR ROWLAND HILL AND PENNY POSTAGE.

“50, Belsize Park, May 9, 1881.

“Sir,—In your impression of April 30th, you publish as an advertisement a wholly unfounded attack by a Mr. Patrick Chalmers on the reputation of the late Sir Rowland Hill.

“In order that your readers may understand what value to place on Mr. Chalmers’ assertions, and why I have refused to enter into any further controversy with him, I request you will kindly publish the enclosed letter, which on receiving his pamphlet I addressed to him in December last.

“The statement which Mr. Chalmers now makes, and to which he says no exception has been taken, has already been shown publicly to be absolutely and ridiculously untrue, as the enclosed documents will prove to you. These documents are published *in extenso* in *The Citizen* of the 16th of April last—the newspaper in which Mr. Chalmers put forward his so-called discovery.

“The Editor, *The Athenæum*.”

“PEARSON HILL.”

The following is the letter above referred to :

“50, Belsize Park, N. W., 30th Dec., 1880.

“Sir,—I have received and read the pamphlet you have sent. I should have little or no hesitation at any time in leaving the public to decide the question which you have raised, viz., whether the late Sir Rowland Hill or yourself has stated that which is untrue; but you commit in your pamphlet so gross an impropriety, to use the mildest term, that its exposure renders any further notice of your other inaccuracies unnecessary. You profess to give the correspondence which has passed between us, but without the slightest hint that you have mutilated the letters—without even showing by asterisks that something is withheld—you have suppressed whole paragraphs bearing on the question at issue. I will not insult your understanding by pretending to believe you are ignorant of the manner in which such a proceeding, when published, will be characterised.

“I am, Sir,

“Your obedient Servant,

“Pat. Chalmers, Esq.”

“PEARSON HILL.

In the next number of the *Athenæum* Mr. Patrick Chalmers replied, admitting and attempting to justify the mutilation of the letters which he had previously, and has subsequently, denied. The Editor, while inserting Mr. P. Chalmers’ letter, very properly added, as an editorial note, that “no one who knew the late Sir Rowland Hill can suppose that he would claim credit for ideas which were not his own.”

Could any sane person put forward statements so uselessly and recklessly “inexact” as Mr P. Chalmers does, or can anyone hesitate as to what value should be put upon his assertions and denials until he shall, at all events, have taken the only course (an action for libel) by which a man can clear himself from charges so serious as those which I have publicly brought against him?



