

MR. ABBOTT'S BIG IDEA

Maltese Cross cancellations were officially used to obliterate the Great Britain adhesive postage stamps and Mulready stationery from May 1840 until 1844, in order to prevent their fraudulent re-use.

Rowland Hill referred to the Maltese Cross as the *croix patée* (a heraldic term). He did not consider the *croix patée* obliterator as perfect. From his point of view it was "too small, and, being light in the central parts, is not so effective in cancelling the label, which is also light in the center"; and suggested to the Postmaster-General the use of an oblong date-stamp.



Figure 1. Imperf. 1d. red-brown with Maltese Cross cancellation.

Postmasters were required to date-stamp their letters, as well as obliterating the postage labels. **The Challenge** was to introduce a workable system of obliteration which would uniquely identify every office in the British Isles.

The Solution: Step forward **Mr. Francis Abbott** (a senior clerk in the Secretary's Office at the G.P.O. in London). His **big idea** was that each obliterator (per office) should carry a different number, which should be assigned to all post offices. In essence, every office should have its own unique number by which it could be easily identified on a piece of mail that it processed, because the number would be integrated on the postage label obliteration.

Mr. Abbott's idea was adopted.

Implementation: From 1844, the Maltese Cross oblitors were replaced by the **numeral** oblitors. In England and Wales the first day of use was 1st May 1844, with a more gradual introduction in the Irish and Scottish offices in June. From 1853, the first duplex cancellations, which combined the date-stamp and the number obliteration, were used.

A Case Study: Newcastle-upon-Tyne (545): Numeric allocation of **545** for **Newcastle-upon-Tyne**. The images below show examples of **Newcastle-on-Tyne 545** usage.



Figure 2. 6d deep lilac (plate 5) issued March 7th 1865 (magnified size): 545 code.



Figure 3. 2 ½ d Blue (plate 23) issued March 23rd 1881 (magnified size): 545 code.



Figure 4. Penny Pink embossed postal stationery (magnified size): Sideways duplex 545 oval shaped postmark. Posted: **NEWCASTLE-ON-TYNE MR 3 1857.**